



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*A Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*

JUNE 2000 CONTENTS

Vedic Prayers	289	Emerging Values—New Hope for the 21st Century	317
<i>Editorial: Hinduism</i>	290	<i>Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty</i>	
Images of India's Past	295	Religion and Life: Swami Bhutesh- anandaji's Answers to Questions	321
On Science and Religion, Bhakti, etc. <i>Swami Ranganathananda</i>	296	Economic Transition in India: A Survey	323
Phalaharini Kali Puja... ..	306	<i>Swami Tyagarupananda & Dr Sujit Kumar Ghosh</i>	
<i>Swami Saradananda</i>			
Perception	307	What is Solit Yet Subtle?	329
<i>Dr. Saibal Gupta</i>		<i>Babaji Bob Kindler</i>	
Saint Namadeva	310	Stories That Inspire: The Gift	332
Biotechnology: A Buddhist/ Vedantic Perspective	315	Book Reviews	334
<i>Prof. Ron Epstien</i>		News and Reports	336

Editorial Office:
Prabuddha Bharata
P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat
Dt. Champawat 262 524
Uttar Pradesh

Publication Office:
Advaita Ashrama
5 Dehi Entally Road, Calcutta 700 014
Phones: 91+33+2440898/2452383/2164000
Fax: 91+33+2450050 • E-mail: advaita@vsnl.com

Please visit our web site at www.advaitaonline.com

Rates of Subscription

	Annual	3 Years	20 Years	Patron (25 Yrs)
India & Nepal	Rs. 60	Rs. 170	Rs 600	Rs. 1500
Sri Lanka & Bangladesh	Rs.180	Rs. 500	Rs. 2500	Rs. 5000
U.S.A. & Canada	US \$ 20	\$ 60	\$ 300	\$ 600
Other Countries	U.K.£ 15	£ 45	£ 225	£ 500

Names of patron subscribers are published in Prabudda Bharata

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 105

JUNE 2000

No. 6

VEDIC PRAYERS

नाकस्य पृष्ठे अधि तिष्ठति श्रितो
यः पृणाति स ह देवेषु गच्छति।
तस्मा आपो घृतमर्षन्ति सिन्धवः
तस्मा इयं दक्षिणा पिन्वते सदा॥
—Rg Veda, 1.125.5

He who pleases gods by performing good deeds will reside in the sinless and ever blissful heaven as its chief. Not only that, he too will become a god! For such a man of good deeds, the waters will become ghee (ie, he will become prosperous in this world also). The earth too will bestow all that is good on him.

दक्षिणावतामिदिमानि चित्रा
दक्षिणावतां दिवि सूर्यासः।
दक्षिणावन्तो अमृतं भजन्ते
दक्षिणावतः प्र तिरन्त आयुः॥
—Rg Veda, 1.125.6

All the wealth, beauty and plenty in this world will go only to him who donates liberally. All the joys of the higher bright worlds (*sūryāsaḥ*) are meant only for him who donates liberally. Immortality becomes a servant only to him who donates liberally. Or, Self-knowledge comes only to him who donates liberally. And long, happy life is bestowed only on him who donates liberally.

मा पृणन्तो दुरितमेन आरन्मा
जारिषुः सूरयः सुव्रतासः।
अन्यस्तेषां परिधिरस्तु कश्चि-
दपृणन्तमभि सं यन्तु शोकाः॥
—Rg Veda, 1.125.7

Those who please gods by charity, sacrifices and so on will not suffer from misery and its cause, sin. Not only those who give but even those who pray also do not suffer. Again, even those who lead principled lives (*suvratāsaḥ*) do not suffer. Let all good things surround such people. Let misery go to only those who are bad-natured.

Hinduism

EDITORIAL

It happened some years ago. In one of the Indian cities there was a not-so-famous writer who wanted desperately to become famous. But in spite of all his repeated efforts, nobody seemed to care for his writings at all! At last he hit upon a wonderful plan. The only way to gain popularity and to become rich was to criticize Hinduism, he understood. He soon wrote a third-class book; it was about Sita. What would Sita have been like had she not followed Rama to the forest, was the theme of this fantastic brainchild of his. And imagine the things he wrote! Naturally there was some disagreement. Then there were those liberal-minded enthusiasts who criticized the 'fundamentalists' for trying to disturb the work of a genius. Amidst all this noise, however, our man had achieved his end: he had become famous and had earned some money too. After all he was a brilliant writer with a modern outlook!

Hinduism is the one religion on earth to be criticized most. Anybody and everybody is at full liberty to say anything they want about Hinduism. This is happening since hundreds of years. Criticism is always good if it leads to health and well-being, and Hinduism has at all times welcomed such healthy fault-finding. But if criticism is only with the intention of condemning, with personal gains in mind, it is absurd. If anyone protests (not like those fanatics of course!) such negative reprehension, he or she is called a fundamentalist or a narrow-minded person. In fact, it has become a fashion for a few Hindus themselves to denounce this religion; whether they know anything about the essentials of this religion or not is another matter.

What could be the reason for such negative condemnation? One is the mad urge to follow alien customs, lifestyles, dress, etc; the

second is power, name and money; and the third is political gain. People are becoming famous nowadays by making movies and TV serials, and by writing books and articles on some rotten fruits of the vast Hindu tree. But they do not necessarily know even the basics of this religion. We should lament with Swami Vivekananda, 'Oh, for an ounce of practice!' If only these so-called ultra-modern people practised a little, and spent a little money to help those about whom they write books and make films, they would have been real helpers of humanity. Do they do that?

This is about India. How do some people in developed countries look upon Hinduism? We can use the word 'Hindu' itself to show the way those critics view this religion. Hundreds of gods and goddesses, innumerable fake gurus and preachers, numerous customs and traditions, disgusting social practices, and unintelligible mantras and tantras—this is the idea many people in developed countries have about the ancient religion.

God and history alone are witnesses to all that has happened to Hinduism and in the name of this religion. Nobody can contest the truth that Hinduism is the oldest religion on earth. This is the only religion to have declared that behind the body and behind the mind is the Soul or Atman. Hinduism is the only religion to have discovered that it is the supreme Reality that appears as this world and living beings. This is the only religion to have given a systematic, scientific and rational explanation of life, creation, etc. Hinduism is the only religion to have produced thousands of illumined souls from amongst both the monastics and the laity. This is the only religion to have seen the advent of many avatars and prophets. This is the only religion to have said boldly that image-worship,

which this religion itself upholds, is not the highest but the lowest stage of spiritual development. This is the only religion to be self-critical. This is the only religion to have given equal importance to the atheist and to the intensely spiritual person. Hinduism is the only religion which has shown a path each to all types of human beings. This is the only religion where there is absolutely no regimentation at all. Hinduism is the only religion which has produced so many martyrs: the horrors of the Holocaust would perhaps pale before the hundreds of years of Hindu suffering and martyrdom. Despite the best of efforts, no one could erase Hinduism from the face of the earth. The darkest hour is that before the dawn. Hinduism has reawakened now. Centuries of humiliation notwithstanding, Hinduism is flourishing today. It is more powerful now than it was ages ago.

A number of excellent books have been written on Hinduism in recent times. There are a good number of scholars who are devoting their careers to the study of this religion. It is the accepted idea now that 'Hindu' is a mispronunciation of 'Sindhu'. Swami Vivekananda has used the term 'Vedanta' to this religion. It is also called *sanātana dharma* or eternal religion.

Who is a Hindu? He who wishes to overcome suffering and enjoy lasting peace and happiness is a Hindu. We can define the word 'Hinduism' as a religion which removes all suffering of its adherents (*anuṣṭhātṛṇāṃ duḥkham hinasti yo dharmah sa hindū dharmah*). Dharma is that which protects those who protect (or follow) it (*dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ*). So also, Hindu dharma is that which protects those who protect it. How does it do it? By removing the suffering of its adherents and bestowing everlasting happiness on them.

The word 'Hindu' is found in some ancient Sanskrit texts. Apte's *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* says that the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, the *Merutantra* of the 8th century, the *Hemanta Kavikośa* and some other texts mention 'Hindu'. However, recent scholarship accepts

the idea that the term 'Hinduism' came to be known during the 1830s—a gift of the Imperial rulers.

We have used the word 'Hindu' to show how people blame this religion. We shall use the same word to show what the religion actually means, and what its ideals are. That is, we shall use the word 'Hindu' to understand the important features of this religion.

Henotheism and Harmony

The first letter of the word 'Hindu' is 'h', which stands for henotheism. The popular criticism is that Hindus worship hundreds of gods and goddesses. But the exact idea behind such worship should be known. The Hindu religion is henotheistic. The word 'henotheism' has been discussed in these columns earlier. However, we can explain this word in this way: though numerous gods and goddesses are worshipped, each god or goddess is individually considered to be the Supreme. That is, when a villager worships a snake-god or when an educated gentleman worships Krishna, it is the Supreme alone that is being worshipped by both of them. This is one of the fundamental tenets of Hinduism. The ideal is to go beyond all such worship to the worship of God in everything and everyone. The Hindu belief in one supreme Godhead, who can assume innumerable forms from village gods to avatars, is to help people of various classes and categories. But the basic concept of Hinduism is that it is God alone who has become everything. He loves his creation much more than a mother loves her dear children. He is pleased with whatever way we call on him and worship him. So there is no irreligion if some villagers worship a snake or stone as God, or an enlightened person thinks of all people as God. There is no irreligion, too, if someone disbelieves image-worship. Hinduism wholeheartedly accepts such people also. Though Hinduism propounds image-worship, it is this very religion which says that worshipping God through the image is a lower stage of spiritual progress. From concrete forms through subtle

ones to the Formless—this is the path of spiritual growth. About image-worship of course Swami Vivekananda has driven the last nail into the critics' coffin.

The letter 'h' also stands for harmony. The Hindu firmly believes in harmony—of spiritual paths, of life, of the goal, and of the different faiths. The reason for such a belief is that this religion is founded on eternal truths. The Vedas are nothing but a collection of everlasting truths. These truths are like the principle of gravity, for instance. Gravity is a truth of this universe which was there before Newton discovered it. So with all spiritual laws. These laws are what are called the Vedas and they are the heart of Hinduism. Of the truths that the Vedas teach, *samavāya* (harmony) is a significant one. Yet another important truth that the Vedas teach is, 'Truth is one but sages call it by different names, *ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*.' This, then, is the Hindu concept of Truth and God.

There are countless sacred books in Hinduism. This may bewilder critics. But even here there is the practice of theoretical henotheism, if we can call it that way. To the Hindu, all the texts preach the supreme Truth and therefore they are all sacred. Any single text, or a single teaching, is sufficient to uplift the soul. Suppose a Hindu dislikes tantric texts. All the same, he is a Hindu. Another Hindu might not have heard about the *Candī*; but just the same, he is a Hindu. Suppose there are some people who have not read the *Gītā* at all but only repeat 'Rama, Rama' or 'Krishna, Krishna'. Are they not Hindus? They are certainly Hindus. Why are so many texts required then? It is again to suit different temperaments. Somebody may like to read philosophy, another may like to read stories, someone else may read poems—the ancient spiritual masters of Hinduism knew all this and so they did not confine the religion to any single book.

The Ideal and Individuality

The second letter in the word 'Hindu' is 'i', and this stands for the second most impor-

tant feature of Hinduism: the ideal. Call it God, Atman, Brahman, Kali, Siva, Krishna; but that which is true and real is the ideal or goal of the Hindu. The goal, in other words, is to overcome suffering and attain lasting happiness. Real happiness and peace are not either in the body or the mind; they are in the Self. The ideal, therefore, that Hinduism teaches is the attainment of the Real by giving up that which is unreal.

Secondly, the Hindu faith is so vast and so all-assuming that it is meant for the benefit of all peoples. Anyone, at any stage of life, can practise any of the numerous paths shown by Hinduism. The goal is one's attaining fulfilment in life. The Hindu religion, therefore, is individualistic. No regimentation here. Again, it is individualistic in the sense that it is unique for each individual. No two people need practise the same thing. Hence the variety. For a critical observer, who perhaps thinks that religion should be regimentation like some military exercise, the variety is confusing and puzzling. But the fact is that the Hindu faith thrives on giving absolute independence to every individual to progress along his own path, though certain very broad ideals are set up for all. One may be a person of knowledge, the other may be a village-deity worshipper, yet another may believe in repeating some mantra, someone else may not believe in God at all but try to serve others selflessly. All these and many more types are Hindus, practising the numerous forms of this great religion.

Nature and Naturality

The third letter of the word 'Hindu' stands for nature. For Hinduism, nature is infinite, even as God is infinite. This has given ample scope for diversity and richness in this religion. Consider creation: creation did not begin today or some days back. There is no beginning or end to creation; it is like night and day. The cycle of dissolution and creation goes on endlessly. The human body too comes and goes. Why does it come and go? Past actions impel us to be born again and

again and to suffer. The goal taught by Hinduism is the removal of suffering and the attainment of happiness. So this rebirth idea gives meaning to our spiritual struggle. If there was no rebirth, what could be the reason for our struggling to attain perfection and liberation in life? If there was no rebirth, if there were no past actions, what could be the reason for our suffering? To undo the knots of past bad actions, all that we should do is perform good deeds. This will bring about peace and happiness. Thus the Hindu faith is perfectly optimistic, unlike what critics feel.

Secondly, the Hindu religion believes in naturalness of approach to God and Reality. The commonly professed path of devotion especially stresses naturalness. Whatever we see and experience in ordinary lives should be deified and that is sufficient for our attaining love of God. Love for one's relatives, parents, children, etc can be seen as love for God, and that is the path of devotion. There is absolutely no need for one to know any scripture at all. If a person loves God just as he or she loves any of the family members, that will do. One more point. There are many ways of life one may lead in order to attain lasting peace and happiness according to Hinduism. One can be a monk or a householder or a student or a retired person—all are welcome to call on God in whichever way they like so that they can attain perfection. Offering just a leaf, a flower, or even a little water with devotion, will please God. This is the uniqueness of Hinduism.

Democracy and Development

The fourth letter of 'Hindu' is 'd' and this stands for democracy. People talk about democracy. However, true democracy is not in the body but in the Spirit. By democracy we mean spiritual oneness. Since every living being is the Self, since 'each soul is potentially divine,' all are one. Oneness is not either in the body or in the mind. It is in the Self. This idea of spiritual oneness brings certain social responsibilities in its train. Of the responsibilities, the foremost is service. 'Then and then

alone you are a Hindu when every man who bears the name, from any country, speaking our language or any other language, becomes at once the nearest and dearest to you. Then and then alone you are a Hindu when the distress of anyone bearing that name comes to your heart and makes you feel as if your own son were in distress. Then and then alone you are a Hindu when you will be ready to bear everything for them...' declared Swami Vivekananda (*Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 379). Democracy is spiritual. It is the rule of the Self for the Self by the Self. This Self is universal. This is the cornerstone of Hinduism.

Secondly, as we mentioned earlier, Hinduism is the only religion which is perfectly optimistic. It believes only in development and progress. No one is a sinner or a bad person. Hinduism is very firm about that. To keep on worrying that we have committed sins has nothing to do with Hinduism. We are all children of immortal bliss. All of us are at various stages of development. All of us can grow from where we stand. Hinduism shows the way to everyone, at any stage of life, to develop and grow. There is nobody here who is damned. Everyone has the infinite potential or the Atman within, and the goal is its manifestation. With its manifestation come peace, plenty, joy and perfection. Life is a long walk towards this manifestation. Hinduism, therefore, believes and teaches only development and progress.

Universality and Unity

The last letter of the word 'Hindu' stands for universality. The diversity of religious practices, the numerous gods and goddesses, the innumerable ways and methods, the endless number of texts and books—all go to show one thing: universality. The world doesn't consist of a few souls. There are billions of people, and our temperaments and tastes are multifarious. But the goal of all human beings is to overcome suffering and attain lasting peace. Hinduism therefore offers food to all the varied tastes. Swamiji remarked that each individual should have a

separate religion. This is what Hinduism intends to do when it offers numerous practices, paths and books.

However, amidst all this diversity is the thread of unity—the unity of the Self, the unity of purpose, and the unity of the goal. This is the uniqueness of this great religion.

What About the Rotten Fruits Then?

When all is said and done, the critics question us: What about the fake gurus, social evils and false practices then? Fake gurus, social evils and false practices are not religion but means of livelihood. Imagine two great scientists discussing a serious scientific question in a laboratory. They begin to drink liquor—an idiocy of modernity—as they discuss. Both drink liberally indeed and become inebriated. The liquor soon begins to affect their mental health and both start quarrelling. After sometime, they come to blows. A mishap occurs and the lab catches fire. Is science at fault?

Religion is not at fault if some fools misuse it for selfish ends. People who discover a favourite pastime in criticizing certain degenerating practices going on in the name of religion do not perhaps know that every big industry has a sewage at the back. Is there any tree called religion or science or institution

which has no rotten fruits? When a religion grows into universal dimensions, when it has come to us after having flowed through diverse routes down the ages, when it has such a long history, there will always be people who misunderstand some of its ideas and utilize them for their own ends. To make serials and movies or to write articles and books about such rotten fruits of the Hinduism-tree only shows the hollowness of their understanding. And those who support such moves too do so with ulterior motives only. One heartening news is that, in spite of all the dirty propaganda, Hinduism, and consequently India, is shining brightly day after day, and is drawing world attention in many fields, even in physical appearance, wealth, science, etc!

Hinduism is not a religion in the sense of faith. It is not a mere belief at all. It is a universal way of life; it is dharma. From dawn to dusk, from rising to sleeping, from birth to death—all that happens to everyone is systematically spiritualized in this religion. To say that this religion of the sages is only this much is to say that the universe consists of only so many planets. Without a broad understanding, it is simply impossible to appreciate the spirit of Hinduism. □

Swami Vivekananda on Hinduism

From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion. ... The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realising—not in believing, but in being and becoming. The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. ... But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. ... Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas, and tries to force society to adopt them. ... The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realised, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols—so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on.

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

The Tea Story

It is Bengal once again! Tea was first grown out of curiosity by Colonel Kyd at Sibpur, Howrah (West Bengal), in 1780. The people of old thought that tea was indigenous to the Himalayas; but they were wrong. The shrub they considered tea was *Osyris nepalensis*. The real tea, *Camellia theifera*, grew wild in the Brahmaputra and Barak areas of Assam. So it has been inferred that Assam was the real home of tea, from where it was introduced at a prehistoric date to China. The re-discovery of the tea plant in Assam has been attributed to a certain Bruce and his brother. Later, in January 1834, Lord William Bentinck constituted a committee to suggest plans for introducing tea-culture into India. Seeds and plants were brought from China and distributed throughout the country. The Assam Tea Company was formed in 1839. Indian tea was sold in the London market. Thus, by 1875, India's tea exports crossed 34 million lbs, priced then at Rs.3 million. By 1880, the exports had shot up to 58 million lbs! (cf. Sir W.W. Hunter, *The Indian Empire*, pp. 600-3).

Influence on Arab Nations

During the 8th and 9th centuries India had direct relations with Baghdad when *Charaka Samhita*, *Panchatantra* and other works were translated into Persian, and thence to Arabic. Several embassies were frequenting the Sindh province from Baghdad. Al-Biruni says: 'Star-cycles, as known through the canon of Alfazari and Ya'kub Ibn Tarik were derieved from a Hindu who came to Baghdad.' Baghdad was also introduced to Indian mathematics through works like *Brahma-sphuṭa Siddhanta* and Brahmagupta's *Khanda Khadyaka*, and through this, to the scientific system of astronomy. It was also through such sources that Hindu numerals were introduced into the Arab system. It is well known that the Indian idea of the first nine numbers and the use of zero simplified and revolutionized mathematics all over the world. Caliph Harun Al-Rashid was more pronounced in his desire to learn from India. He sent batches of Arab scholars to India to learn the various sciences, while Indian scholars themselves went over to teach philosophy, toxicology, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, etc. The names of several Indian scholars who visited Baghdad are preserved in Arabic texts, say historians.

The Lion

The History and Culture of the Indian People (Vol. 7, p. 339) says : 'The most powerful monarch of the world relentlessly attempted to destroy one man, and he braved all adversities to emerge triumphant.' That 'one man' was the great Maharana Pratap Singh. No one could destroy him. How did his end come by then? One day, while hunting, Pratap accidently struck his own bow to his body and was wounded. This wound proved fatal, and he passed away on 29 January 1597. Thus ended the greatest monarch's, ie Akbar's, nightmare.

On Science and Religion, Bhakti, etc

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, currently President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, conducted, during one of his annual three-week lecture tours of the USA, this illuminating question and answer session at the request of Swami Bhashtyananda, the then head of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago. In the February, March, April and May issues of Prabuddha Bharata, parts of the account of the session appeared under the titles of (1) On Conversion, Real Teachers, etc, (2) On Reincarnation, (3) On Vedanta, Christianity, etc, and (4) On Guru, Advaita, and the Avatar Concept. Here we publish the final part.

Question: *About India, the conception is that lack of technological progress is somehow tied up with the emphasis on spirituality. Would you say that Hinduism is essentially anti-modern technology and progress? And how pragmatic is your Hindu tradition?*

Swamiji: Hinduism is something very strange. It is never against technology, never against science—not at all. It has no built-in antipathy as we had in the Western world against the development of science. In Western history, ancient Greeks were for science. Then came anti-science with the emergence of Christianity as a widespread religion, and the setting in of the Dark Ages in Europe. And Western people began to take interest in science only when they came in touch with ancient Greek culture. During the intervening 1500 years, Western people were taught by the Roman Catholic Church to be against all sciences and some scientists had to face death at the hands of the anti-scientific, all-powerful Roman Catholic Church. Technology is only an offshoot of science. The truth is that modern India takes to science and technology greedily with the greatest ability. As a recent report says, India has the fourth largest technical manpower in the modern world. Great Indian teachers also have said, 'Go in for science, go in for science'; because, India respects all knowledge, all technology. We have got one Goddess of Wisdom, Goddess of

Learning, presiding over every type of knowledge, beginning from shoemaking up to the highest spirituality. That is Sarasvati. You will find, during the worship of Sarasvati, a carpenter placing his instruments before the Goddess, and a doctor putting his stethoscope there, seeking Her blessings; so also, great scholars put their books there. The Vedas will be put in front of Her. Every knowledge is sacred, according to the Indian tradition. There is nothing low or high so far as knowledge is concerned. With that background, India or Hinduism cannot have anything to say against technology or science.

Today in India, we are developing science, technologies, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, surgical science, etc, in a big way; but it is not new to India. Two or three thousand years ago, India developed many sciences, and according to the contemporary standards, India was very high in that field. I am quoting the words of an Arab scientist of Cardova, Moorich, Spain, by name Qadi Sa'id (1029-1070 AD). He writes:

The first nation (that has cultivated the sciences) is (the people of) India who form a nation vast in numbers, powerful, with great dominions. All former kings and past generations have acknowledged their wisdom and admitted their pre-eminence in the various branches of knowledge. ...

Among all the nations, during the course

of the centuries and throughout the passage of time, India was known as the mine of wisdom and the fountainhead of justice and good government, and Indians were credited with excellent intellect, exalted ideas, universal maxims, rare inventions, and wonderful talents. ...

Today's Western astronomy is nothing but a more precise form of putting what India has spoken about astronomy and cosmic evolution long ago. Similarly, medicine, surgery, and even plastic surgery. This information you can get in the famous book *Our Oriental Heritage (The Story of Civilization, Vol. 1)*, by the famous American author and historian, who died last year, in 1981, Prof Will Durant. He writes not only on the above subjects but also on India's contribution to mathematics: the decimal system, the value of zero, heliocentric theory, and the law of gravitation. Anyone can go to New Delhi today and find a tall thick iron pillar, cast about 1500 years ago, standing in sun and rain all these years, without any touch of rust on it. The country which has all the above scientific discoveries to its credit cannot be against science and technology, as mentioned in your question. But the spiritual development of the people and the intense attraction of the inner life took away some energy from this physical field. Physical sciences began to die out because of human interest being shifted to the religious side after about 10th century AD. That is being corrected in the modern period. We shall retain our spiritual heritage, but activate the great scientific heritage by which alone we can overcome human undevelopment in India today. That was the great contribution of Swami Vivekananda in the modern period.

Question: You talked about what was happening about caste in India, but what should be the modern Hindu's attitude towards *varṇāśrama*, specially when you read in the *Gītā* about *varṇāśrama* and things like that?

Swamiji: *Varṇāśrama* is a combination of two concepts and two words, *varna* and

āśrama. What you speak of as caste refers to the *varṇa* aspect of that *varṇāśrama*. Already I have told you that, in the modern period, caste that has flourished in India all these two thousand years is going to disappear completely. Nobody can sustain it; modern conditions are going to destroy it; and we are all happy at this. All the great modern teachers and leaders of India welcomed this abolition of caste-privileges, because it militated against human freedom and equality in a big way. That is why caste or *varṇa* has no place in India today.

The *āśrama* system, however, stands on a different footing altogether. I wish modern sociology will take note of this wonderful concept of *āśrama*. It means, you divide human life into four periods. In those early days, it was understood that human longevity was 100 years. Throughout the Vedic literature and up to about 1000 years ago, we understood that the average human lifetime was 100 years. If you live a decent, healthy life, you are sure to live 100 years. So a long life is provided. In every blessing in marriage, people say, '*jivāma śaradaḥ śatam*, may you live 100 autumns.' That is the blessing.

Now, what shall we do with these 100 years? Life has many things for a human being to achieve. The first achievement is organic satisfaction—a baby is born, it wants organic satisfactions, and therefore that is called *kāma* or *bhoga*, organic satisfaction. Then comes *artha* or wealth, to satisfy the organic cravings. Thirdly comes ethical sense, a sense of mutuality in society. That is called *dharma*. And lastly comes *mokṣa*, which is spiritual freedom—transcending this sensory life. So these are the four values of life sought after by every human being. According to *sanātana dharma*, or what is popularly called Hinduism, it is known as the theory of the four *puruṣārthas*. *Puruṣa* means a human being, and *artha* means what is sought after. What does a human being seek? A man or woman seeks food, shelter, clothing, and sensory pleasures; also money to satisfy these

cravings, and also ethical sense to be able to live in peace and harmony with other people in society, which he or she needs for his or her own development. Lastly, he or she also feels all these as something irksome at a certain stage and desires to go beyond these urges and develops a certain hazy urge for something trans-social or transcendental, which is called spiritual freedom or *mokṣa*, the last great *puruṣārtha*. The first three are common to all, so they are separately mentioned as *trivarga*, the triple set—*dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. These are universal human cravings.

How to organize life so that everybody can experience all these four? That was the problem in the minds of the great sages of ancient India who formulated human life in an organized way, with a direction. It should not be stagnation at the sensory level or a three-feet forward and four-feet backward process. Life must have a forward direction; society must have a forward direction. Human evolution must have a forward direction, a goal; our sages put that evolutionary goal as *mokṣa* or spiritual freedom.

That was the truth of Indian sociology which the sages expounded; they said that the first 25 years of human life must be given to education. There is so much to know; so much of past and present heritage is coming to a human child at birth. Let us spend the first 25 years for this wonderful purpose of education, and develop the capacity to advance knowledge in new directions. That is the first *āśrama*, the *brahmacarya āśrama*, the student period. *Āśrama* means a state of austerity and striving.

Then, after 25 years, you enter into the next or second stage of life, the *grhastha āśrama*, the life of the householder—marriage, rearing a family, social and citizenship responsibility, and doing good to society. Then, by the time you are 50 years of age, middle age, you must hear the call of the higher values of life. Until about 50, life is mostly at the sensory level. But, there is something higher. When you begin to hear that call, you slowly

begin to retire from intense activities outside, and more activity begins inside for personality development, spiritual development, which was there in a small way in the first two stages also. But you begin to do it a little more seriously from 50 onwards. What is the criterion of that withdrawal from external activity? In a marvellous passage, the law book called *Manu Smṛti* gives two criteria. When you notice that your hair begins to turn grey, take thought of this great ideal of spiritual freedom; the body is not going to stay for long. So many things you have neglected during the first two stages of life. Now the time has come to look into them. This is the first criterion. And the second one is, when you see the face of your grandchild, you have done your genetic duty to nature, to the future generation. You can now think of higher things. Develop detachment, rise to higher levels. That is called *vānaprastha āśrama*—going to live in the forest. In those days, when this was formulated, going to the forest was very easy. One mile outside the village was all forest. The greater part of India was all forest at that time. So going to the forest was very easy. Today, however, it is not so easy. That is why we have to adapt this *āśrama* to the new conditions. The ideal remains the same. So many people have thus gone to the forest, even to the Himalayas; many people you will find sitting there in meditation. You will find householders giving up their mundane affairs and going and meditating in the forest *āśramas*. Even kings and emperors renounced their thrones to develop spirituality in ancient India. That is called the third *āśrama*—the *vānaprastha*. *Vana* means forest.

Finally, *sannyāsa*, the last 25 years; to give up all external attachments, renounce everything, and be alone. *Sannyāsa* means being alone with the Atman or Brahman—‘the march of the alone to the alone.’ That is a beautiful concept. In the last stage of life’s journey, a human being travels in single file, not in double file. That is the meaning of *sannyāsa*—to be alone. Here there

is no hatred towards humanity, no hatred towards society. But, you get the capacity to digest aloneness and will never feel lonely. Then only it is truly aloneness. That is the *sannyāsin*.

These are the four *āśramas* or orders of life—*brahmacarya*, *grhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sannyāsa*. The great sociologist and lawgiver Manu has given the highest place to the householder. Because the householder, through his or her honest labour, sustains the whole of society. A *brahmacārī* does not earn, the *vānaprastha* does not earn, and the *sannyāsin* does not earn. Only the *grhastha* earns through labour and sustains the whole of society. Here are the words of Manu:

*Yasmāt trayopi āśramiṇaḥ
jñānena anyena ca anvaham;
Grhasthenaiva dhāryante
tasmāt jyeṣṭhāśrami grhi.*

(*Manu Smṛti*, 3.78)

'Because the householder provides education and food to all the other three *āśramas*, the *grhastha āśrama* is the pre-eminent *āśrama*.'

When you fulfil your citizenship responsibility, then only you are fit for the higher stages called *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*. This is a wonderful conception of social order. When I was on a one and a half years' lecture tour of the USA and South America in 1968-69, I could sense a tremendous urge in the hearts of people here to experience the third and the fourth stages. That was called the 'dropout' or hippie movement period in American history—'I don't like this society, this obligation. You came to visit me; I must visit you. You gave me something; I must thank you. I am tired of all this social formality. I must be free, I must be free.' In every human heart, at some time, this kind of irksomeness will come. Then, what shall we do?

America witnessed a tremendous phenomenon of this type, young people, from well-to-do families, began to drop out—a beautiful phenomenon. At that time I was travelling here and I had to deal with this subject in many universities. I used to tell

them, 'You know how to drop out, but you do not know where to drop in; that is your problem.' So, many became criminals, drug addicts, and so on. And, after some years, the movement fizzled out for want of direction. India has a tremendous continuing tradition of drop-outs and of drop-ins. The higher spiritual development is a type of drop-out without dislike for society. That is the wonderful concept of Indian sociology; but, today, in the modern society, everyone continues to earn money throughout life, always busy with the same thing, like a child playing with toys—what a foolish thing it is! There are other things to run after, to attain.

Now, this voice comes today from a Western source also. The famous Zurich psychologist, Carl Jung, in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, says that human life can be divided into two parts—the forenoon and the afternoon. Up to 35 years, it is forenoon, because he thought 70 years to be the longevity of human beings. Today, we can make it 40 years, a little addition also. The forenoon is meant for finding your feet in this world—education, marriage, rearing a family, performing a job, doing good work—all these are called the forenoon activities. He calls it 'achievement', a technical word. What have you achieved in your life? Don't be rolling about here and there; achieve something. That is the mission of humanity's forenoon. Achieving this, you cross that middle age—35 or 40. Then, you must listen to another music, ie, you must think of your own personality enrichment. You have neglected many things in life; now you must attend to them. So the afternoon of one's life must be given to 'culture', as he calls it. Actually it means inner culture, inner enrichment. This is the second part of human life. Then Jung says as a warning, 'If you continue what you did in the first part, called "achievement", into the second part, ie, "culture", you are in for trouble.' Because in the first part, essentially it was nature's work, as an instrument of nature, that you were doing. Rearing a

family is nature's work; you are just an instrument of nature, you are not free there, you are just being used by nature, that is all. Therefore personality development cannot come so much from there. So, in the afternoon of life, you must concentrate on personality development or 'culture'. 'If you do not do so', he says, and I am quoting his sentence (pp. 125-6): 'Whoever carries over into the afternoon the law of the morning—that is, the aims of nature—must pay for so doing with damage to his soul just as surely as a growing youth who tries to salvage his childlike egoism must pay for this mistake with social failure.' You will be diminishing your personality; you become smaller and smaller as you grow older and older. Nature or society does not need you as you become older. You are thrown on the sands. You are not wanted, that feeling will come. For example, if you are not fit for work, society also does not want you; because reproductive period is over, nature also does not need you. Then can you find a value for yourself in yourself? That is the language he has used in that famous passage, where the Indian concept of the third and fourth stages of life, *vānaprastha* and *sannyāsa*, become silently emphasized.

The *Gītā*, in its fourth, fifth, and sixth verses of Chapter 7, gives two dimensions to nature, unlike only one in the Western physical science. They are *aparā vidyā*, lower nature (which Western science investigates), and *parā vidyā*, higher nature, consisting of the principle of intelligence, *jīva bhūtam*, as the *Gītā* expresses it. These two constitute the whole universe, not one alone.

I think our modern civilization will gain immense strength, immense peace of mind, immense fulfilment, if it respects a little this wonderful classification of human life as *brahmacarya*, *grhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *sannyāsa*, with whatever suitable modifications are needed for our highly technological civilization. That is what I have to say on this subject of *āśrama dharma*. It is a wonderful concept in Hindu sociology. Sociology needs

to give a direction to the human life. That is the spiritual direction, the experience of that higher nature, *parāprakṛti*. Today, the life after retirement from jobs is close to the *vānaprastha* concept. The human being has to grow to a higher direction. The cerebral system has been evolved by nature for us for that very purpose. Are you free? Are you fulfilled? That is the one question the higher nature will ask you. You have no answer; you are going round and round all the time. The same thing, eating and drinking, for 100 years. It looks very hopeless. There is no poetry in it. But, this spiritual direction gives you new dimensions to conquer. That is the wonderful idea behind this *āśrama dharma*, after taking away that *varṇa* or caste element from it.

Question: Since there is a belief in the philosophy of oneness with God, why is it that people go through such pain and suffering and trials in this life?

Swamiji: The philosophy of oneness will benefit us only when we realize that truth. Till then we are under two forces. One is from within the individual, and the other is from the social environment as well as the little physical organism that we are. The interaction between the organism and the environment constitutes the life of any individual. In Indian thought, we have the concept of karma. Whatever we experience is the product or result of our actions in our past life or earlier part of this life. So, karma theory stands for the law of cause and effect applied to human life and action. One cannot escape the effect of one's action. That is the language of our Indian scriptures. Cause must produce its sure effect; as the Bible puts it: 'As you sow, so shall you reap.' That is the concept of karma. We are inheriting all this karma—our own karma, not somebody else's karma. Therefore karma theory gives you a beautiful idea: karma is the eternal assertion of human freedom, said Swami Vivekananda.

Every human being is free; if he made himself like this, he or she can unmake also, because that is the meaning of being free. One

is free to make as well as to unmake one's life. Nobody else is there to do it for one or to deter one; others can only help. That is the meaning of karma theory. Where there is no karma theory, it is replaced by the irrational concept of the devil.

One wrong understanding of the karma theory was the idea that if a person is in distress, it is due to his or her karma and one can remain indifferent. Thus many people remained indifferent towards their fellow-men who were suffering, thinking or believing that such suffering was due to the karma of the unfortunate sufferers, and we need not interfere in that problem. That was the wrong understanding which was not the idea of the teachers who expounded this theory. If it is their karma to suffer, it is our karma to go and help them. They are certainly paying for their karma, but it is our karma to go and help them in this condition. Thus, society will develop into a happy interacting medium where we are helping each other to rise higher. That is why the social environment also will begin to help you to go higher and higher. For example, some students want to get education, and I am here to help them. In this way, you work out their karma through your karma intertwining with their karma. That is called interaction of human beings in society. That is how we can help everybody to develop his or her fullest potential, according to our capacity.

Question: I have a very practical question. I would like to get your viewpoints about vegetarianism versus non-vegetarianism, specifically for people and their children who come from a country which practises vegetarianism to America and live in its non-vegetarian environment.

Swamiji: The whole subject of vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism in India, till now, was based on family tradition or social tradition. The individual had no choice in the matter. In the southern states of India, among the Vaishnavas, and other orthodox groups elsewhere, we find a predominance of vegetarianism; therefore, in India, even when one

is a non-vegetarian, one respects the vegetarian way. That is always true. I am myself a vegetarian throughout my life. Today the conditions are different, especially among those who have come and settled down in a predominantly non-vegetarian country. Even in America, the vegetarian sentiment is growing. I can see that in more and more vegetarian hotels coming up in America. Now, I say that children from India in America should not be coerced into vegetarianism; persuasion is good. You can say, 'This is our custom for ages. If you like, you can follow.' But coercion is of no use because that will make them secretive, and they will spoil their character. And then, you can tell them that there is nothing inherently wicked in being a non-vegetarian. There have been as many good people among non-vegetarians and as many wicked people among vegetarians. We do not find a perfect equation between the two. Therefore, we should be a little more human in approaching this matter. I personally believe that if a father and a mother are vegetarians and their son or daughter says, 'I want an egg, I want a fish', the parents must be able to cook and feed them, because they want it. That is the attitude that is good today if you want to have peace in society and harmony at home, because they are going to do what they like. You must understand one truth, which Swami Vivekananda had said: 'Vegetarianism is a beautiful idea. If you choose it freely for your own inner growth, then it is all right. When you thrust it upon people, it is not very desirable.'

Secondly, character or the good life is not essentially a product of either vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism; it is most peripheral in significance. Something more inward is needed for that. So, as Jesus would say, 'We wash the outside of the cup, but the inside is dirty.' So we are trying to beautify everything outside, but inside is dirty. I have seen some people in India, pure vegetarians, but sucking the blood of other people. That type of vegetarianism has no meaning. I respect modern

Western vegetarianism which developed as a matter of real humanist conviction and that vegetarianism, therefore, becomes humanism—respecting even an animal in trouble. I am here to help a human being or an animal in trouble. That is the beautiful concept of vegetarianism. Indian vegetarianism needs a lot of transformation. It has become static, it has become just a sort of cloak for all the wickedness that we can indulge in. But, when you choose vegetarianism from being a non-vegetarian, as Swami Vivekananda said, in spiritual life, a certain stage may come when you may begin to feel, 'I don't need non-vegetarian food, I don't want it'. That is the real vegetarianism. We want people with conviction in vegetarianism. That is what is happening in the modern period. India is now developing a lot of non-vegetarian tendencies in various parts. Vegetarianism still remains in India as a prominent way. But, we should not associate good character and sainthood with the one, and bad character and low life with the other, because that is not true. There is no equation at all, absolutely no equation. Jesus and Buddha were non-vegetarians; so also were Sri Krishna and Sri Rama. Some of the Jain monks were also non-vegetarians up to the ninth century AD. Not that they regularly cooked and ate. They went daily to houses for begging, and whatever was given, they took, even if it happened to be meat. The Buddha also did the same thing. Prof Alsdorf of the Indology Department of the Hamburg University in Germany, who was a specialist in Jainism, took me round his Indology Department during my 4-month lecture-tour of 17 European countries in 1961. I have mentioned my interview with him in the first volume of my 2-volume book *A Pilgrim Looks At The World* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, p. 377): 'His exposition of the growth of vegetarian sentiment in India was interesting. All the ancient incarnations, sages, and saints of India, including Buddha and Mahavira, he said, were meat-eaters, according to ancient texts. I wanted to know how the founder of Jainism,

which is strongly vegetarian, could be included in this category, to which the rest had been accepted to belong. He read out to me references to Mahavira's meat eating in the *Bhagavati Sūtra* or the *Vyākhyā-prajñāpti Sūtra*, 15th śataka, where the reference is to fowl's meat; the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, he said, only prohibits monks from accepting as alms meat of animals with many bones; the *Daśavaikalika Sūtra*, as also Haribhadra, the Jain scholar of the 8th century AD, refer to meat eating. Prof Alsdorf holds that the prevalent strong vegetarian sentiment even among Jains, and the Hindus in general, is a recent development, of the ninth or tenth centuries AD only. I referred to the amazing phenomenon of a meat-eating nation as a whole developing a strong vegetarian sentiment. He said that he was engaged in writing a thesis on this subject.'

Question by a gentleman: I have one more question along the same lines. As there is a family tradition to be vegetarian in India, similarly, there is a family tradition to be religious also. Once the family comes out of India to this country, the family tradition is no longer available. Then, how should one impart religion to one's next kith and kin growing in this country?

Swamiji: If you can separate the purely sociological from the spiritual, then the matter is easy. The sociological element of a religion is not easy to practise in another social context. But, the spiritual element is universal. In the North Pole and the South Pole, you can practise the spiritual side of religion. Today, Sri Ramakrishna has come in the modern period to give us the spiritual side of religion—the manifestation of the ever-present divine spark in every human being. Teach every child this truth, which it will find to be true as it grows older and older. The divine spark is in every human being and the need is to unfold that divinity within. This, as a base, can help parents to impart a beautiful spiritual education to their children. Other things will be added to it in a natural way. Whatever of the Indian sociological setting is useful to

it will remain, because one is seeking this truth in that way.

Question: *What is the difference between tantrika sadhana and Vedic sadhana, and under what circumstances would you recommend the practice of tantrika sadhana?*

Swamiji: All these sadhanas—Vedic, tantric, etc, have undergone tremendous changes in the course of ages. Tantric sadhana also is undergoing such changes. In the middle ages, there was so much of secrecy in tantric sadhana. Today all secrecy is to be avoided. Whatever is openly possible, that kind of tantric sadhana will continue. That is what Sri Ramakrishna did in the modern period. Vedic sadhana has become transformed into the *jnana marga* and the *bhakti marga* of the later period. That is what you find today. Through worship, through meditation, through all other spiritual practices, you develop your spirituality.

In tantra, we have both bhakti and jnana. That is the beauty of that path. And, the special importance of the tantra path is that you do not do violence to your human nature, your tendencies, your impulses. These are taken gently, handled, and transmuted into a higher direction. That is the beauty of all bhakti religions, particularly the bhakti of the tantra religion. Generally, tantra is Advaitic or non-dualistic, devoted to the Divine Mother. Siva is the transcendental Impersonal Absolute and Sakti or the Divine Mother is the personal aspect of that Absolute. You concentrate on Sakti in the tantra worship. That is why in Sri Ramakrishna's teaching, you find a beautiful blending of Vedanta and tantra. That will be the guide for India for the future centuries.

Question: *You just mentioned that we have an astral body or subtle body, which goes on taking birth after birth. What is the difference between the soul and the subtle body? Do animals have the soul or subtle body?*

Swamiji: The English word soul is exactly the word for what you call *sūkṣma sarīra*,

the subtle body, in Vedanta. The subtle body is even now functioning in us, only we are not aware of it because it is subtle. So, when death comes, the subtle body sheds away the physical body, or the gross body, and manufactures a new gross body for itself for working out its own karma. That is the nature of this subtle body, *sūkṣma śarīra*.

Question: *I want to ask you about bhakti. Bhakti seems to me to be a lot of emotion, like a child's crying. How can one rationalize this, knowing that you are yourself God, according to Vedanta?*

Swamiji: You have reduced all bhakti only to tears. There is much more to it than mere tears. It is emotion, certainly. What is the wealth of a human personality? It is emotion. Take it away, and the human being will become like a table or a chair. Even a bird cannot build a nest without emotion, says Sir Charles Sherrington, the famous British neurologist of the modern period. That emotion is what makes a person a rich individual. So what shall we do with this energy of emotion? Bhakti is the science that trains these emotions under the light of reason or jnana to take it to the highest level of human development. That is the bhakti expounded in the *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, the greatest book of bhakti. You can get six cassettes from the Swamiji here, in Chicago, expounding this message of bhakti of *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, very rational, very practical, and enriching the human personality—the capacity to love, to communicate; because God is love, and that manifests a little in your heart. Then you become extremely loveable and will love others as well. That is the nature of bhakti. When that emotion comes, a little tear will come; that is beautiful. When people saw Mahatma Gandhi watching the cremation of his wife, Kasturba, in the Pune prison, one drop of tear appeared in his eyes and he gently wiped it out; that one drop of the highly disciplined Gandhi's eyes is equal to torrents in others' eyes. Even the most dry Lutheran Christian in Holland had shed tears at that time. His wife told me, 'My

husband was in tears on hearing the news. And I told her, 'Very good, let him have tears. It is needed when we are too masculine and too dry.'

Question: I am talking to you from the dualistic point of view. In other words, we say God is there; you are raising up the emotion by subtle means. But, in the end, even dualistic theory ends in oneness, because the separation disappears, a person realizes himself as divine eventually.

Swamiji: Not in bhakti. In the bhakti path, the soul does not become one with God. The soul enjoys God. That is the nature of bhakti. A bhakta is happy to be separate from God and enjoy Him—the Divine Personality. The Christian bhakta, the Hindu bhakta, all of them, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it beautifully, think that it is better not to become syrup, but sit and drink that syrup. What is the use of becoming syrup? We want to enjoy syrup. A bhakta belongs to that category. We respect him or her; we don't want to convert him or her into a jnani.

Question: I am going to ask you a personal question. Have you witnessed God?

Swamiji: If you view this subject in the light of Swami Vivekananda's definition of religion, it will be easy to understand: 'Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.' A little manifestation of this Divinity makes for greater capacity for love, loving service, and efficiency.* All values are thus spiritual; physical nature, physical science, physical body, and the sense organs are not the source of values. Only the ever-present Divine in all, the Atman, is the source of values. That is called spiritual growth; and all human beings can achieve it in their daily life and work. That is the teaching of Vedanta. Without some spiritual awareness, I could not have lived a monastic life these many years. But I have yet to go some more distance. God is not an item among items. It is just a spiritual presence in everyone and within all. When one becomes aware of it, one becomes spiritually enriched thereby. It does

not disturb anything in life, only enlightens everything. Suppose there is no light in this room; the table, the chair, and other things are there, and all of you are sitting here. Suddenly you put on the light. Nothing changes; you are where you are, but you just become illumined. That is the meaning of spiritual life. That can come anywhere and to anyone; a shoemaker can get it, a housewife can get it, a professor can get it, an executive can get it; because it is our birthright. God is present in the hearts of all. To realize Him is easy, provided the mind is clean and pure. That is the only condition for spiritual realization. That is a great utterance also by Jesus. I take it as the supreme utterance in the Bible, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' The word 'see' has got a deep meaning; you experience God, that is the meaning.

Question: Will you kindly give us, the Indian section of this gathering, a parting message?

Swamiji: I was asked to speak in Washington, three years ago, on a wonderful subject—'The spiritual and cultural aspects of Indo-American relations.' I liked it, and the audience also liked it. So here is that subject. People from India have come here; a new type of Indians, not the Red Indians but the other Indians. Red Indian is a great Indian; but this is a new Indian coming from far away. The West had a great secret love for India. And Columbus discovered this America while he was in search of India—not in search of America—and thought it to be India; hence came the name Indian to the native Americans. Later, Indians from India have come here. They are here to serve this country like any other American, as citizens. And they have behind them an ancient 5000-year-old culture. Prof Will Durant, in his 242 pages devoted to India in *Our Oriental Heritage*, in the last section, 'Farewell to India', says (p. 633):

One cannot conclude the history of India as one can conclude the history of Egypt, or Babylonia, or Assyria; for that history is still being made, that civilization is still

creating. ... It is true that even across the Himalayan barrier, India has sent to us such questionable gifts as grammar and logic, philosophy and fables, hypnotism and chess, and above all, our numerals and our decimal system. But these are not the essence of her spirit; they are trifles compared to what we may learn from her in the future. As invention, industry and trade bind the continents together, or as they fling us into conflict with Asia, we shall study its civilizations more closely, and shall absorb, even in enmity, some of its ways and thoughts. Perhaps, in return for conquest, arrogance and spoliation, India will teach us the tolerance and gentleness of the mature mind, the quiet content of the unacquisitive soul, the calm of the understanding spirit, and a unifying, pacifying love for all living things.

One blessing every Indian here has behind him or her is his or her ancient culture, which has never indulged in any foreign aggression, or in destroying other peoples' happiness. *Uniformly peaceful international relations is one of the most outstanding features of India's long history.* She had military power; she had political strength; she had unified empires. But never did she go out to conquer any other nation. This is a tremendous blessing on the head of every citizen in India and from India. Remember this as your greatest gift to any nation, that wonderful attitude of tolerance, understanding—live and let live attitude. And that is why India is alive even after 5000 years, even after many, many ups and downs. In spite of centuries of foreign invasions and subjection, India is still strong, still young. That we owe to its Advaita or non-dualistic philosophy and spirituality of the immortal Upanishads. There is tremendous spiritual strength behind that India. Let your children in this country be impressed

with that great spiritual strength behind them. It is there in their blood; they must learn how to rediscover it. And here, in America, there is tremendous scientific efficiency. If you can combine this efficiency of America with the Vedantic spiritual efficiency of India, you will enrich yourself and enrich this great country as well. If you live a good Hindu life here, and I had emphasized it when I was in Australia just a few weeks ago, and also in Europe, this great Vedanta can influence you to live a happy family life, integrated family life—love and service between husband and wife, respect for each other, and love for children, bringing them up, and live such a Hindu life without the need to preach it, you will be doing immense good to this great country, as also to India. Develop an integrated family life. We need it in America in a big way, because problems are multiplying due to the breaking up of families, and the children are the worst sufferers in such a situation. So, if Indians here can stress this particular influence, by example, it will be a substantial cultural contribution to America. That is my request to our Indians settled in this great country. Indo-American friendship was first forged by Swami Vivekananda in the last decade of the 19th century. It is a tremendous friendship, unaffected by day-to-day political differences. A tremendous friendship between India and America had been earlier initiated by some American thinkers like Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Thoreau. I call it the beginning of Indo-American history. It became intertwined from the time of Swami Vivekananda onwards. This is going to develop further and further, as decades pass. You are one of the instruments for bringing about this harmony between this great modern nation and that great ancient nation. □

Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Know the Truth and practise the Truth.

—Swami Vivekananda

Phalaharini Kali Puja

SWAMI SARADANANDA

A unique event took place on the Phalaharini Kali Puja day in June 1872 according to The Gospel of the Holy Mother. We present a few relevant passages of that event from Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master. Divine Mother Kali will be worshipped as Phalaharini on the 1st of this month.

A little more than half of the month of Jyaishta had elapsed. It was the new-moon day, the holy occasion for the worship of Phalaharini Kalika Devi. It was the day of a special festival at the Dakshineswar temple. Sri Ramakrishna had made special preparations on that day with a view to worshipping the Mother of the universe. These preparations, however, had not been made in the temple, but, privately, in his own room at his desire.

It was 9 pm when all the preparations for the mystery-worship of the Devi were completed. In the meantime, the Master had sent word to the Holy Mother to be present during the worship. She came to the room and the Master started the worship.

The articles of worship were purified by the Mantras and all the rites preliminary to the worship were finished. The Master beckoned to the Holy Mother to sit on the wooden seat decorated with the Alimpana.

While witnessing the worship, the Holy Mother had already entered into a divine semi-conscious state. Not clearly conscious, therefore, of what she was doing, she, like one charmed with Mantras, sat facing north to the right of the Master, who was seated with his face to the east. According to scriptural injunctions the Master sprinkled the Holy Mother repeatedly with the water purified by Mantras from the pitcher placed before him, then uttered the Mantra in her hearing and then recited the prayer:

O Lady, O Mother Tripurasundari who art

the controller of all powers, open the door to perfection! Purify her (the Holy Mother's) body and mind, manifest Thyself in her and be beneficent.

Afterwards the Master performed the Nyasa of the Mantras in the Holy Mother's person according to the injunctions of the Sastras, and worshipped her with the sixteen articles, as the Devi Herself. He then offered food and put a part of it into her mouth with his own hand. The Holy Mother lost normal consciousness and went into Samadhi. The Master too, uttering Mantras in the semi-conscious state, entered into complete Samadhi.

A long time passed. The second quarter of the night was over and the third had far advanced, when the Master, whose delight was only in the Self, showed a little sign of regaining normal consciousness. Returning to the semi-conscious state again, he offered himself to the Devi. He now gave away for ever at the lotus feet of the Devi his all—the results of his Sadhanas, his rosary, etc—along with his self, and saluted her uttering the Mantras:

O Thou, the auspiciousness of all auspicious things! O doer of all actions! O refuge! O the three-eyed One! O the fair complexioned spouse of Siva! O Narayani! I bow down to Thee, I bow down to Thee!

The worship was at an end. The Master's Sadhana reached its culmination with the worship of the Ruler of the universe, the Divine Mother in the body of a woman, the embodiment of spiritual knowledge itself. □

Perception

DR SAIBAL GUPTA

One of the famous cardio-thoracic surgeons of India today, Dr Saibal Gupta is also well known as a writer on diverse subjects. His book Āmār Samoy is a collection of articles published in various prestigious Bengali journals. In this article, to be published in two parts, Dr Gupta explains perception in a novel way.

What is perception? Perception is that magic moment, that fleeting ethereal flight into realization and knowledge, which is not acquired through the senses, and which is the lowest form of knowledge in Plato's epistemology. Is it a suprapersonal rationality of man, acting on his ideas?

In a room full of different objects, two boys are allowed to enter and stay for a minute. They are then asked to give a list of the objects. The two lists will be different. It is an old Boy Scouts game known as Kim's game. Why do their perceptions differ? Because the two boys have two different patterns of perception and those objects which find, so to say, ready and familiar sites in their brains are registered easily. If both of them are now asked to write an essay on the room, their essays will also be substantially different.

Dealing with the subject and the object as well as their interrelationship has dominated early Greek and Western philosophy. Ultimately the object has won. Objectivity and logic became the cornerstones of human reasoning and concept of reality. The process started with Aristotle and was then incorporated into the Semitic religions. It was the strongest in the southern part of Byzantium, Alexandria and Spain, which were mainly under Islam, and infusion of these ideas into the rest of Europe through northern Italy brought about the Renaissance. It is only now that this total reliance on objectivity for an understanding of reality is being questioned as science delved deeper and deeper into the question of reality in the microcosm and the

macrocosm.

Let us take the geometric definition of a point and a line. A point has no length or breadth or height, and a line has no breadth but has only length. How can there be anything in space without length or breadth or height? Is it possible to conceive of such a thing? Now, this was only a mathematical assumption and not an objective fact. However, on this assumption has been built the most magnificent buildings, cathedrals, mosques and temples. Therefore such an assumption is useful and utilitarian. But how do we know if it is real? Just because an assumption is useful it does not mean it is true. Today much of the confidence in science is because it is useful. But the deeper it delves into the reality of the universe and life, the thinner become its solid grounds. It may be argued that as science progresses further, all these ambiguities will be resolved just as in the past. But it is becoming obvious that such a solution is not possible without solving the problem of perception.

Actually this realization came to science quite some time back—let us say during the last century, but it was not generally perceived. The pillars of Euclidean geometry and its basic assumptions were challenged at that time. Euclid's fifth postulate, that only one parallel to a given line can be drawn through a given point, was shot down by a Hungarian and a Russian—Bolyai and Lobachevski. The German mathematician Riemann shot down Euclid's first postulate that only one line can be drawn between two points. Thus a whole

structure of non-Euclidean geometry came into being. This crisis in the foundations of mathematics was attacked by many people, most notable of whom was Jules Henri Poincare, a professor at the University of Paris in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bertrand Russell described him to be, 'by general agreement, the most eminent scientific man of his generation.' The details of his mathematical deductions and solutions are beyond the scope of this article and its author, but of greater interest is the fact as to how Poincare arrived at them. Poincare's analysis of that is embodied in his book *Foundations of Science*. These solutions appeared to him not when he was thinking intensely about the diverse facts which were contradictory and only pointed to a void; the solutions came to him when he was passing a sleepless night, tossing in bed after drinking black coffee. He was on a geological expedition and had forgotten all about mathematics and the truth came to him by simply looking at a cliff. There were two other similar situations. He then analysed the solutions on the background of these situations and decided that the solutions were not merely intuitive. He realized that among the large mass of varied and contradictory objective facts he had actually chosen those which contributed to the greatest harmony. Beyond that there is no fundamental place to go and the question becomes meaningless. He actually wrote, 'This is a true aesthetic feeling which all mathematicians know but of which the profane are so ignorant as often to be tempted to smile.' He actually hypothesized that this selection of contradictory facts was made by his 'subliminal self.' It was beyond intelligence and beyond intuition. What is this subliminal self? Is it the self at its lowest conscious intensity? Is it at that stage that perception becomes acute? Poincare was also one of few scientists who could anticipate the coming of and understand the theory of relativity when it came.

The theory of relativity brings us to another great scientist of our times, Albert Ein-

stein. That is another great stalwart in the fields of perception and harmony. His article on 'Science and Religion' is full of these ideas and is an obligatory reading for an inquiring mind. Only a few excerpts can be given here. 'The cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research,' he writes, and again, 'It is very difficult to elucidate this feeling to anyone who is entirely without it.' The cosmic religious feeling must be contributive to the subliminal self of Poincare, where the ego is at its lowest. And this feeling of the subliminal self is very difficult to convey to someone who is driven by the ego. Further on, he writes, 'How can cosmic religious feeling be communicated from one person to another, if it can give rise to no definite notion of a God and no theology? In my view, it is the most important function of Art and Science to awaken the feeling and keep it alive in those who are receptive to it.' Let us take the second sentence first. Why does the scientist write about art? Is it just because he was an amateur violinist of more than average calibre? Imagine listening to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony; or an excellent rendering by Ravishankar or the Raag Bhairav in the voice of Bhimsen Joshi in the darkness of the early hours of the morning. It gives us immense pleasure. Why? There is no objective material gain. What is this pleasure which is beyond self? We are transported immediately to a world of immense joy, which is beyond self, the Suprapersonal. Similar is the case in literature and visual arts. Is it possible to be in this joy all one's life? Einstein equates this with the ecstasy of science. What about us, the common people, who are not great composers or great scientists? Can we not be in this joy? In the first sentence he says that it has nothing to do with God and theology. It is important to ask here what Einstein means by God, as the word God means different things to different people. Einstein has himself said that he does not believe in a personal God delivering justice: either punishment or reward. He believes in

Spinoza's God. And what is Spinoza's God? Spinoza denied that the Bible was inspired by God down to the last letter. He was declared a heretic and deserted by his family. He led a lonely life practising his profession of polishing lenses. He identified nature with God. He said that God is All and All is God. He also said that every individual is an expression of something infinitely bigger. Everyone should see himself in the background of this eternity in order to achieve true happiness and contentment. It is our passions—such as lust and ambition—which prevent us from achieving it. A Vedantist will say, 'That's right; so whatever else remains is God.' The difference between Spinoza and Vedanta is that Spinoza does not say how to become what he asks people to become, but Vedanta also shows the way. The God that Einstein cannot believe in is the personal God of Christianity—the extreme dualism of God, his son Jesus, and the human sinner. We have known for a long time, for a few thousand years, that dualism is devotion, where a man looks at God as being outside of himself, sometimes with supernatural qualities, with ten arms, and so on. But for the jnani, the seeker on the path of knowledge, God is ultimately Advaita, the enlightened Self, *tat tvam asi*. A devotee can also attain enlightenment at the end of his quest when he perceives unity with the object of his love. With Christianity this is the only way possible. Western scientists have always rebelled against this God of dualism, of an

external causality, because it does not correspond to their idea of reality, and we too have been needlessly drawn into this argument forgetting our own heritage. There is no conflict between Vedanta and science. In fact they are complementary and often Vedanta sets the questions of perception for science. I shall quote a recent letter from John Wheeler, who now occupies the Einstein chair in Princeton University, at the end.

Some of the latter day scientists, unto the modern times, have discounted the religiosity of Einstein as his personal opinion, brought about by his childhood upbringing, rather than his science. Of course there are others who agree with his cosmic religious worldview. Those who disagree and will not be drawn into a discussion of divinity—like Feynman and Penrose—are really agnostics, not atheists. But even they cannot discount perception, for herein lies the instrument used for observing the common basic unity and harmony from among the large mass of often apparently contradictory facts of objective experience. For otherwise, how does one explain the emergence of one great physicist or mathematician among the many, when the facts are there for all to see? It is that old Kim's game of the Boy Scouts. That is why the modern-day physicist is progressively inclining towards the study of that which perceives—the human brain.

(to be continued)

Can Science Conquer Death?

Someone asked: 'Will science ever conquer death?' The famous biologist and geneticist J.B.S. Haldane replied: 'I object to the phrase "Will science conquer death?" because it is a double metaphor. Science does not do things, men do; and conquest is also a metaphor. If you mean, "Will men, using scientific methods, abolish death?" I think it most unlikely. But they may conquer it in the sense of making it no longer feared. Hinduism and Buddhism both teach that it is an evil that men should die with unsatisfied desires. I agree with them, though I have yet to be persuaded that such a death leads to rebirth. I think that premature death is an evil which can very largely be avoided. If "science" can give us long, healthy, and happy lives, with sufficient knowledge of psychology, and means of applying that knowledge to prevent attachment to objects of desire, then it will not be senseless to say that it has conquered death.'

Saint Namadeva

Maharashtra was the scene of great spiritual revival between the 13th and the 17th centuries. We present the glorious life of Namadeva, a famous saint of Maharashtra of that period. This is a retelling from an article published in The Voice of India (July 1945).

Namadeva was born on Sunday, Shukla Ekadashi of the month of Kartik, in 1270 AD. His father Damasheti (Damaji) was a tailor in Narsinghpur and his mother's name was Gonnaibai. An astrologer had predicted that Namadeva would compose a hundred crore devotional songs called *abhangas*. Even as a little boy Namadeva showed very marked devotional tendencies. That he had implicit faith in God and a deep feeling of the reality of His presence was revealed in an incident that occurred when he was still very young. It was the custom that meals prepared in the homes of Pandharpur be taken to the temple and offered to the Lord before they could be served to the family. Once, during a temporary absence of Namadeva's father, his mother, Gonnai, sent him to make the food offering. The little boy had not yet been instructed how to do this, but he performed the worship as his heart prompted, after which he offered the food, saying, 'Lord, I place this meal before you with full faith in its acceptance, and come what may, I shall not stir from here until I see you eat it.' The Lord, whom Namadeva knew as Panduranga Vitthala (a name of Lord Krishna), appeared and ate the offering to the last morsel.

The next day Namadeva's father accompanied him to the temple with a fine dinner. When the worship was over, they asked God to accept the offering. Again Vitthala showed himself to Namadeva, but Damaji saw nothing. 'Lord,' pleaded Namadeva, 'here stands an old man who has been seeking you all his life. None is more worthy to see you than he. Please give him the power of vision.' Then the Lord made himself visible to the father. 'O Lord, O my heart's hope!' cried Damaji.

'What good deeds must I have done in the past to deserve the sonship of this little boy, through whom I now see you!'

Even in his early youth Namadeva was disinclined to follow the trade of his father, who was a tailor. Not only that, but he disliked all worldly activity, and gave away in charity everything on which he could lay hands. At this Damaji was pleased, Gonnai was displeased. Shedding tears, Gonnai would go to the temple and cry to the Lord, 'O Lord, you are no longer a comfort to me. My only son you have appropriated. In praying to you he forgets himself and the world, he dances and sings and weeps. If only you would make him prudent!' But whether Gonnai complained to the Lord, to the world, or to Namadeva, it was all one to the latter who cared only to fulfill his life's vow: 'Whether I live or perish, yet on Panduranga my faith is set.'

Only once did Gonnai succeed in influencing Namadeva's way of life. That was when Damaji died and the son's heart was deeply touched by his bereaved mother's grief. She used well the advantage this gave her, forcing him to marry Rajaibai, who was very much like herself. Both women had one dream, prosperity; both urged him to fame and self-aggrandizement; and each indulged in bitterness and invective when he could not be induced to forget Lord Panduranga, when he gave away his patrimony to the poor. Day and night they preached worldly wisdom. Namadeva paid no heed; so Rajai would say to her mother-in-law, 'It is the worship of that Lord, Mother, which is playing havoc behind the scenes.'

Despite the wasps of family life that

were loosed upon him, Namadeva kept his mind serene. Though he led a wonderful householder's life, his mind was always on God. He longed for the Lord, and for nothing else. His days were spent at the temple; he entertained his devout friends. Soon Gonnai again complained to Lord Vitthala: 'Alas, Lord, what numbers of visitors pour into our house day and night to sing your praises! Whenever they cross our threshold, they think they are invited to dinner, and make no ceremony in eating up all our food. And such are Namadeva's rules of hospitality that we cannot say nay. Lord, human fortitude cannot stand it much longer.'

Namadeva never criticized his mother for her worldliness. He felt that Lord Panduranga was his real mother, as his poems often show.

One day when the family was in need, a stranger (who, according to tradition, was the Lord himself) came to the door and gave Gonnai and Rajai a sack of gold. That night Namadeva returned to find his children dressed in silk, and a savoury dinner prepared. When he learned the cause, he cried to Panduranga, 'This is not the food I wanted, O Lord! I prayed to you for the food of wisdom, not for the dust the ignorant call gold.' Gonnai and Rajai quickly spent this wealth, and there is a legend telling how they discovered a means of obtaining more. Rajai borrowed a philosopher's stone (which could turn all base metals into gold) from a rich man. When Namadeva came home and found his house heaped with gold, he threw the philosopher's stone into the Bhima river and sat down upon its banks to meditate. Learning what had happened, the rich man rushed to Namadeva in anger, but Namadeva remained perfectly calm and began speaking of the rich man's advancing age, of his long life given exclusively to worldliness, and of the necessity of his marking out a better path and pursuing it without delay.

The rich man made lengthy objections which Namadeva countered with irrefutable

replies. This went on for hours, thousands of people gathered to hear—but eventually the rich man fell silent as the grass by the river, and Namadeva plunged into the clear flood of the Bhima, bringing up quantities of philosopher's stones. 'Here, you have not one stone only, but as many as your hands will hold. Test them if you like.' But the rich man threw them again into the river, being no longer interested in gold. Namadeva had turned his mind, and the minds of many bystanders as well, to Lord Vitthala.

As years went by and the family was still poor, Gonnai conceived a plan by which she hoped to interest her son in business. She borrowed a thousand rupees at five percent for six months, telling him that he must invest this money in 'an imperishable concern.' To invest the money on Gonnai's conditions was possible in only one way, as Namadeva saw it. Could he invest in cloth? No, cloth was perishable, as was every other commodity. Humanity was the only concern worthy of the investment. So Namadeva decided to give a banquet for all the poor and miserable, irrespective of caste, during which he would instruct his guests, making the feast an occasion for imparting spiritual knowledge. This banquet-school was to continue indefinitely. It would be a perfect example of Namadeva's idea of preaching and conversion. All began as planned. While the guests enjoyed the food, Namadeva urged them to practise the behests of the scriptures. Within five days many unfortunate ones had been helped and others were beginning to benefit. But at this point the merchant who had advanced the thousand rupees put an end to Namadeva's project in a tumult of rage over his 'squandered' money. So Namadeva's plan fell through, leaving him utterly discouraged over humanity's plight. 'O Lord!' he cried, 'Your children suffer! Save them!' At these words, Lord Vitthala appeared to Namadeva. He pointed out that no one was really suffering but Himself, since all beings are parts of Him. Namadeva found this difficult to under-

stand. The Lord said, 'When the sun shines overhead, who can distinguish the rays from the disk? You are like a ray, and who can separate you from me?'

It is clear that the Lord wished Namadeva's bhakti to become firmly grounded in knowledge. But Namadeva replied in the negative: 'To me you are the master and I am the servant.' The Lord said no more, but tradition holds that he inspired the contemporary philosopher Jnanadeva to ask Namadeva to accompany him on a pilgrimage, so that association with Jnanadeva would stimulate the feeling of jnana in Namadeva's heart.

Namadeva felt honoured by Jnanadeva's invitation, but so centred was his life on the Presence in the temple that he could scarcely tear himself away from the temple precincts. 'Sir,' he said to Jnanadeva, 'You entirely forget that I am not the sole master of myself. There is Lord Panduranga guiding my destinies, and nothing against his wish I can do.' But at that time it is said that he heard the voice of the Lord, telling him to go. Sadly he went, and with many a look behind. 'O Lord,' he cried, 'every step I go forward takes me farther away from you. The mountains, the brooks, the trees, the stars—all are dull without you.' To Jnanadeva he said, 'First Lord Panduranga taught me to love him. Now he sends me away to far lands to pine and perish alone.'

Jnanadeva said, 'He sends you to far lands, Namadeva, but not with the purpose that you pine and perish. By the next time you meet him you will have caused numberless men to become intoxicated with his love. As we go on, we shall spread the cult of singing and dancing in his name.' 'Nevertheless,' cried Namadeva, 'in sending me away he has cast me off.' Jnanadeva grew impatient. 'If he has cast you off, he has also cast me off.' Namadeva replied, 'That he has not. You have realized him in your soul, and whether you are in one place or another, it is all the same to you.' Now Jnanadeva asked, 'Then

what prevents you, Namadeva, from realizing him in your soul? There sits Lord Vitthala all the while in your heart.' Hearing this, Namadeva began sobbing. 'Say no more! Leave the Lord alone, I pray, sir, leave him alone to me!'

Soon the pilgrims came to Hastinapur (Delhi), where they made a long halt. Every night prayers and *sankirtans* were held in a house set apart for the purpose, and devotees gathered there in large numbers. Namadeva would sing in praise of Lord Vitthala, and the others would respond until the place shook with the sound of their devotion.

Namadeva's capacity to sway the multitudes increased daily. One night a *sankirtan* party gathered in a famous temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Namadeva stood facing the image of the Lord, and began to sing His glory. He sang and sang, but suddenly priests appeared. Though their bodies were clad in clean clothes, their souls were steeped in worldliness. Finding the passage to the sanctuary so congested with the immense crowd hanging spellbound on Namadeva's singing that they could not pass through without being touched, the priests burst into fury against Namadeva, who meekly left the front of the temple for the rear. Here he could no longer glorify the Lord standing face to face, but he could go on singing to the Lord's children, who stood patiently waiting to hear his sweet voice once more. For the second time Namadeva began to sing, and though he continued the entire night, not one listener departed until Namadeva himself left with Jnanadeva at sunrise.

Once when almost overcome with thirst in the wastelands of Marwar, they reached a well only to find it dry. In this extremity Namadeva sat down to sing the name of the Lord. Soon water sparkled in the bottom of the well, rising slowly until it overflowed the brink. As the pilgrims knelt to slake their thirst, Jnanadeva said, 'It seems, Namadeva, that you have the Lord ever at your elbow to feed and nurse you with almost feminine

care.' Namadeva smiled. Jnanadeva's words indeed seemed true—yet Namadeva still thought of God as dwelling exclusively in the temple of his native Pandharpur; and because of this he rejoiced as they turned homewards.

At last he saw his own village on the far horizon! Namadeva rushed to the innermost sanctuary. 'O Lord,' he cried, 'I visited many shrines and holy places, but never did I find one to surpass your home, nor any river to equal your ever flowing Bhima river. Wherever I saw the image of a deity I thought of you, and your form had first place in my heart.' Possibly the Lord understood that his devotee had not yet achieved a deeper realization. He detached the garland of flowers which spread richly over his bosom, putting it around Namadeva's neck. 'May this garland, my son, strung as it is with flowers of various colours, and bound together by the thread of unity, awaken in your mind remembrance of that oneness of Spirit which is behind and beyond the phenomenal world.'

As years went by even Namadeva grew less predominantly emotional. Finally, having discarded the dualistic ideas to which he had clung so tenaciously, he attained to a spiritual state in which he saw Lord Panduranga Vitthala everywhere and in everything. Legend relates the following account of the consummation of this vital change in his life and thought: Gora the potter, who had been one of the select circle of devotees, invited his friends to dinner. During the feast he entertained his guests with stories of the boyhood of Sri Krishna, speaking with such realism that his listeners soon felt themselves transported to the golden age. 'For my part, O great ones,' concluded Gora, 'I do not wish I had been there to gambol with Lord Sri Krishna, nor to see Him fight with the *rakshasas*, nor to feast with Him, nor to hear Him play on His flute. Nay, I would not be so presumptuous. But, holy sirs, I who am a potter, a manipulator of earth—oh! how I wish I had been but a little clod of earth, even for a moment, in that noble age; that I had

earned the blessing of receiving and retaining the impress of Sri Krishna's lotus feet, forever to be worshipped in my soul!'

When the refreshments were over, Jnanadeva said, 'Gora, you are well known for pot-making. Not only has your pottery exceptional merit, but you are highly skilled in distinguishing the well-baked from the ill-baked pots. So I crave a service at your hands. You will have to extend your operations to pots of a different sort. Here before your eyes you see, as it were, many human pots. I ask you to examine them and declare which are well baked and which are not.' Gora objected, but Jnanadeva insisted upon the test. At this Gora fetched the little pater used in testing his pots, and passing along the line of guests, gave a slight blow to the head of each. All went well until he struck Namadeva's head, and said, 'This is the only pot, Jnanadeva, that my pater finds to be unbaked. No doubt it requires a little more heating, after which I dare say it may be the best of the lot.' These words and the laughter they evoked wounded Namadeva's heart. He did not know how to act before a company that unexpectedly singled him out for ridicule; so he sat mute. At long last the entertainment came to an end, and he could depart. Straight to the temple he rushed and impatiently asked Lord Vitthala what was wrong with him. There was a long silence but at last he heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Do you remember how I once likened myself to the sun and you to one of my rays? How far have you identified yourself as my ray? Regarding me as someone separate from you is the root of ignorance. It is this defect that made Gora find you wanting. Yet, when I told you to be my ray, I ought to have sent you to a preceptor competent to teach you. I shall send you to one now.'

'Alas!' wailed Namadeva. 'Let everyone mock me, let the sun burn me for refusing to be his ray, but permit me, unworthy as I am, always to follow in your footsteps as your servant.' The Lord said, 'Nay, my son. The

attitude of a servant is all very well in its place, but the time has come for you to lay it aside. Now go to Visoba in the temple of Mallikarjuna: he is the man to teach you.' Then, as Namadeva still hesitated, he heard the Lord commanding him to go and he was forced to do so. But as his steps carried him ever nearer the intended preceptor, the grief that filled his heart burst forth anew. 'Alas!' he wept, 'Why have I renounced all? Bed and board, kith and kin, name and fame! I am ridiculed by my mother, my wife, my children.' At this he lifted his voice to Panduranga. 'Lord, you have been to me kith and kin, name and fame, food and drink! You have to me been everything! And what evil have you found in me that I should now go forth to seek service of a stranger?' In this way Namadeva wept and wailed every step of the way to the temple of Mallikarjuna.

When he arrived at his destination he sought Visoba in the dim light of the shrine; but could find only an aged figure lying as if asleep in a corner. Inquiry proved this to be his man. As he appraised the shrivelled form from head to foot, he was struck with horror to see a small image of Lord Shiva lying beneath Visoba's feet. What sacrilege! Rudely Namadeva shook the old man until he began to emerge from his sleep, or meditation. 'I cannot move my legs!' cried Visoba. 'They are too stiff. Kindly lift my feet from this spot.' So Namadeva removed the feet from the image, and placed them some distance away, but another image of Shiva sprang up beneath them. Namadeva became suspicious. Was this old man a necromancer? Cautiously he examined the images and the floor all around. Then he transferred the old man's feet to another place—a hundred times he did so—but everywhere a new image appeared. Namadeva's bewilderment turned to de-

spair. But at this moment he happened to look full into the open face of Visoba—and its calmness struck him to silence. That serene face shone gloriously as a star in the clear firmament. In a flash Namadeva knew that here was one whose devotion lay beyond the comprehension of the human mind. This old man, by his very sacrilege, made the Lord lie under his feet. The incalculable difference between himself and Visoba! Namadeva stood mute as a statue before his conqueror, as if he were a trophy won by the old man in a celestial contest. For the first time he sensed what the Lord wanted of him. With that he turned to his teacher and broke the silence: 'O Soul-centred one, dispel my darkness, give me light.' Thus Namadeva came to be instructed by Visoba, under whose training and guidance he quickly changed old views for new.

On a certain morning after Namadeva had returned from Mallikarjuna and was at home devoutly engaged in worship, a mad dog suddenly rushed through his open door, snarling and showing its fangs. As its hunger was still unsatisfied, he fed it another helping, and yet another. At this, the appearance of the dog began to change before his very eyes. Then he realized that it had vanished altogether and in its place, shining in immeasurable splendour, was Lord Panduranga Vitthala himself! 'O Lord, O my heart's delight!' cried Namadeva, 'I was seeking you for years and years in skies and temples, when all the time you were the inmost core of my heart. You are everywhere, my Lord!' The Lord said, 'This is indeed wonderful, Namadeva. Your perfection surpasses my estimate.'

As the astrologer had predicted about Namadeva, Namadeva composed a billion *abhangas* or devotional songs. He passed away in 1450 AD. □

Do such work as will contribute to the real well-being of people. Therefore do I urge you in the service of Jivas in a spirit of oneness.

—Swami Vivekananda

Biotechnology

A Buddhist/Vedantic Perspective

PROF RON EPSTEIN

Prof Ron Epstein teaches philosophy at San Francisco State University, USA. In this article, he briefly discusses the importance of a religious outlook towards the newer scientific developments. This article is a gift from AHIMSA.

We are on the threshold of a biotech century that is going to reshape totally life on the planet in many ways—economically, politically, scientifically (particularly in terms of medicine), and environmentally. Most important for many of us, though, is the relationship between this incredible new century and the biotechnology. Very little has been written about its relationship, and particularly about that of genetic engineering, with the human spirit.

Let me just mention two ways in which genetic engineering is profoundly affecting our lives. First, at the time of writing this, the United States government is considering a request by medical scientists who wish to intervene in the gene line of human genetics, that is, to change the genetic structure in ways that would be transmitted to future generations. This would mean that, in a sense, evolution in the traditional sense would come to an end and that we would begin to take over responsibility not only for the evolution of human beings but also for the evolution of many other sentient and non-sentient beings on this planet. Second, the use of genetic engineering in bio-warfare. As we write, many governments are actively working on the development of genetically engineered organisms for use in bio-warfare, and presumably terrorist organizations are doing the same. These are just two of the things we must deal with in the immediate future and in the coming biotech century.

I would like to write something about a

Buddhist/Vedantic paradigm. I think this is important because the way in which we deal with biotech/spiritual issues will be directly related to the lens through which we see those issues. Paradigms cause us not only to focus on and clarify issues but also to distort those issues, so it is important to look at our paradigms closely.

Let me then mention some of the principles of the Buddhist/Vedantic paradigm, if I may lump those two vast systems of thought together for a moment, that are perhaps somewhat different from both the dominant paradigm of our scientific culture and also from many of the paradigms within Christian theology. The first aspect I will mention is that of ahimsa or non-injury. Ahimsa is the principle of intrinsic respect for the life of all sentient beings, not just human life. It respects sentient beings not for their usefulness to us as tools or means to ends, but as beings with their own inherent needs and worth. It is out of this principle of respect for life that the idea of selfless compassion as a guiding principle arises. In terms of genetic engineering, this would exclude any instrumental use of human or non-human sentient life, and I could give numerous examples of such instrumental uses which have been and are being carried out in the interest of the profit motive by biotech companies.

The second principle is, from both the Buddhist and Vedantic standpoints, the cosmos is an open system, whereas in science one deals with artificial, closed systems. Now

what does this mean in terms of genetic engineering? It means that built into the open system model is the assumption that it is impossible to know, through scientific methodology, the full extent of the possible effects of genetic alterations on living creatures. We can have neither certainty nor even a reliable risk assessment, using the scientific model, of such effects.

Next is the principle that the world is non-Cartesian, that is, that mind and body are non-dual. They are not qualitatively different. Moreover, mind and spirit affect the body, and the body affects mind and spirit. This is why the karma-based ethics of Buddhist and Vedantic systems insist upon purity of mind, body, and spirit because they are inter-related

and affect one another.

I hope in this short presentation you have been able to follow the gist of this paradigm which differs so much from the mainstream paradigm of scientism. Please think over this then. If body, mind, and spirit are indeed inseparable, is it not possible that genetic engineering might interfere with the ability of sentient beings to attain transcendence and liberation? There is no scientific experiment or risk assessment that can answer this question for us. From a Buddhist and Vedantic standpoint, the risks are, to say the least, troubling. □

(Next month: *Biotechnology:
A Christian Perspective*)

Let us Not Forget this!

India's treasure of myths and symbols is immense. In the teeming texts and multitudinous architectural monuments eloquent details so abound that, though scholars since the end of the eighteenth century have been editing, translating, and interpreting, it is by no means an infrequent experience to come across tales hitherto unnoticed or unknown, images undeciphered, expressive features not yet understood, aesthetic and philosophical values uninterpreted. From the second millennium BC, the Indian traditions have been handed on in unbroken continuity. Since the transmission has been mainly oral, there is left to us only an imperfect record of the long and rich development: certain periods, long and fruitful, are barely documented; much has been irretrievably lost. Nevertheless, though tens of thousands of pages remain in manuscript still waiting to be edited, the great works already published in printed Western and Indian editions are so many that no individual may hope to cover them in a lifetime. This inheritance is both prodigious and fragmentary, and yet homogeneous to such a degree that it is possible to present the main features in a simple, consistent outline. ... It would not do to seek to constrain the Oriental conceptions into the delimiting frames familiar to the West. Their profound strangeness must be permitted to expose to us the unconscious limitations of our own approach to the enigmas of existence and of man. India—as Life brooding on itself—thinks of the problem of time in periods comparable to those of our astronomy, geology, and palaeontology. India thinks of time and of herself, that is to say, in biological terms, terms of the species, not of the ephemeral ego. The latter becomes old: the former is old, and therewith eternally young.... Hindu myths and symbols, and other signs of wisdom from afar...will speak to us of the treasure which is our own. And we then must dig it up from the forgotten recesses of our own being.

—quoted from Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*

Emerging Values

New Hope for the 21st Century

PROF AMALENDU CHAKRABORTY

Some vital questions need to be answered today if we wish to strike a balance between super-modernity and tradition. Prof Chakraborty, formerly head of the philosophy department, Presidency College, Calcutta, asks these questions and presents a beautiful picture of the usefulness of inculcating values.

The story of human behaviour throughout the ages is one of constantly changing values. Among the questions often discussed are the following: How civilized is our society? Can human nature be changed? Why is right proper? How do we test our moral standards? What are the principal moral values and what insights do we gain from them? What principles do we need to keep in mind before we enter into business or other professions, listen to the mass media, engage in politics, and face many new and baffling problems in the thermo-nuclear and space age? Can we make our morals up-to-date and construct a value-oriented moral philosophy which will bring us a reasonable degree of fulfilment and enable us to live like mature men and women?

The Meaning of Value

Now what do we mean by 'value'? To define the term is surprisingly hard, and many thinkers have thought it impossible to define it. But it is easy enough to give examples. As examples of minor values, we could cite such experiences as toasting one's toes before a pleasant fire, having tea in the midst of a seminar, watching World Cup cricket on television, and taking a cool plunge on a hot day. As examples of major values, we could cite the love of Shakuntala for Dushyanta, the hearing with full understanding of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or the sitar recital of Pandit Ravishankar, the experience of Schweitzer in ministering to his African abo-

rigines. Is there anything that all these values have in common? Yes, they have. And I think they are three.

In the first place, they are all experiences. One may say that there are many things that are valuable besides experiences, and it is true that we commonly talk that way. For economists, anything has value that can be exchanged for something else one wants; for example, money or a diamond ring or a grandfather clock. But why should anyone else want these things, and why should I want things they will exchange for? The answer in both cases is the same. It is because these things are means to experiences that are wanted for their own sake. Things are always wanted for the sake of experiences, never experiences for the sake of things.

Secondly, these values are not only experiences, they are pleasant experiences. Every experience valued for its own sake is suffused with a flush of agreeable feeling. This does not mean, of course, that hard work, mental and physical, or even the acute suffering of an illness or a bad conscience is not good in a sense, only it is good in a different sense. If we call these things good, it is not because we seek them out for their own sake, but because they are the means to later states of mind that are thus sought; in short, they are instrumental, not intrinsic, goods. We admire people who can face sufferings with Spartan fortitude in the interest of a cause. But if we find a man who has cultivated illness or pain for

its own sake, we should be wary in approaching him. We should assume that he is a crank and not improbably a psychopath.

Our point so far is that all goods involve pleasant experiences. Is there anything more that is essential to them? I think there is. And perhaps the best way to see it is to take an example which had perplexed and even tormented John Stuart Mill. To Mill, Socrates' life was better because, whether more pleasant or not, it involved a completer fulfilment of powers. Let us grant the pig as generous a gastronomic capacity as we wish. Still we must admit that its intellectual, moral, and aesthetic horizons are non-existent, while those of Socrates are all but unlimited. What gave Socrates' life its value was the free play of a magnificent mind, the fulfilment in thought, feeling, practice of a great intellect and a great heart. This gives us the clue to the third component of all values. Besides experience, and pleasant experience, there must be fulfilment of natural faculties or powers. Values are not adventitious to human nature. A value is a value because it speaks to our condition, answers to our need, meets and completes some demand of our nature. And the more central and fundamental the demand, the greater is the value attaching to its fulfilment.

In the light of all this, we may describe a value as an experience that is at once pleasant and fulfilling. And our question now is, what is the place of values, so conceived, in education? The emergence and elaboration of the philosophy of values is destined to be regarded as the peculiar contribution of our age to future generations. Value education will be a failure if it is considered exclusively as moral teaching only. We need not elaborate on the value of education per se, but when it comes to the inculcation of values it means making an effort to help pupils develop a questioning mind. For example, they are to undertake value-judgement strategies concerned with varying situations related to, say, family obligations, classroom and campus

life, health problems, ethnocentricity, cultural identity or diversity, environmental issues, religious interculturization and political commitment. By undertaking such an exercise the young are capable of developing adequate response capability in making appropriate decisions throughout life. It is only value-awareness that can help in correct decision-making. It is a kind of torture to commend values and make children accept them without any effort at helping their understanding. Of course, to avoid intellectual and behavioural anarchy the process is initially through following traditions and conventions till questions are aroused.

The inculcation of values in education raises a very important question. Will a student entering higher education have the freedom of choice of studies and of the institution which is most nearly related to the values he or she holds? The value priorities of a faculty or programme notwithstanding, other considerations should not be allowed to wipe them out. Education is a systematic process to help the potential of students to bloom in its own fullness. Value conflicts are more acute among the youth today. They are confronted by a large number of choices than in earlier times. The alternatives presented often are extremely bewildering. The sophistication of modern society makes it increasingly difficult to make choices because of the complexity of contemporary life. Perhaps the hardest job many children have to face today is to learn good manners without seeing any. Instead of allowing the young to discover their own values, parents, guardians, teachers and leaders try to save them from any risk of making wrong choices. This is a method of 'value transfer' and is never 'value inculcation'. The laissez-faire approach to value transmission allows the possibility of indulgence or even licence. This cannot bring the desired results. Value transmission is seen to be more effective through person-to-person relationships, and the process is dependent upon congruence between theory and practice in the life of

the transmitter.

The young are continuously exposed to conflicting values. They do not fail to discover the dichotomy between theory and practice. They suffer, and may fail to identify those values that will lead them to a cherished goal or motivate them to act in a way that will reflect their innate dignity and pride of position. The psychological content of value judgements creates conflicts between conscience and obedience, dharma and religion, liberation and permissiveness, consumerism and sufficiency, and so on. For a value-oriented education we need to study in depth all these aspects and prepare an efficient pedagogy and a satiable methodology to inculcate an awareness of the values inherent in all such terms. We should apply a two-step approach for programme implementation. First, teachers should be encouraged to attend in groups brief courses which will make them conversant with value concepts regarding behavioural sciences. The second step in the programme would be the training of specialist teachers in graded courses—diploma, degree, and postgraduate—to create an adequate stream of academic personnel to pursue a value education curriculum as a multidisciplinary course. This would reinforce not only teaching methods in other disciplines but would also contribute standards of high quality in the educational environment as a whole. The programme needs to include continuing research and surveys on values, on the slow change of value-awareness, on environmental perception, on value-learning and value-teaching, and on the results along with feedback from action research.

It is a universal phenomenon that the integrity of political and national life has undergone a general decline all over the globe. With India, the basic trouble today is that we are not Indians, nor are we Western in any real sense. With our traditional values suppressed, we leave ourselves open to the more superficial and glamorous aspects of Western life. We are willingly and consciously turning

away from Indian values in order to adopt an attitude to life that is concerned with the exclusive and blinding influence of technological advancement. We overlook the abiding qualities without which life becomes meaningless. This encourages the growth of a sensate culture instead of directing us towards spiritual values. It is an attitude that makes for greed and exploitation.

We often hear about corruption everywhere. Now, what is corruption? It is selfishness of people without values, the selfishness of the separatist attitude. Minds that have been left unguided, undisciplined, minds without an ideal or a clear view of a noble tradition to fulfil. These are the minds that are open to corruption. Further, a large part of our society lives in a state of ineffective goodness. It is complacent in the delusion of its own goodness, yet is full of cynicisms. Such people lack alertness. They do not come forward to resist evil. Thus it is that corruption alarmingly threatens to overwhelm our treasured heritage.

But there is an Indian way of life, a way of life that is unique and remarkable in values. The founding fathers of our constitution identified these values, and to uphold them accepted the concept of secularism. Secularism in itself has a value content. It can give vitality to our democracy. But the real source and strength of democracy is spirituality or in the perspective of the Indian heritage, 'dharma'. When dharma is replaced by the word 'religion', we miss most of its significance, for 'dharma' is concerned with facts. It means the essence of a thing which gives its identity. Fire has no religion but surely it has dharma, that is, its capacity to burn, to warm and to give light. In the same way, man has something very special that makes him unique. This uniqueness is the urge to know the truth, to establish goodness, and to love beauty. It is these that are his dharma, that make him human among beings. Dharma is, therefore, the source of his enduring values, which never change. In the enthusiasm of our politi-

cal activities we often want to denounce religion and talk of secularism. This lands us in confusion. In rejecting religions we are only rejecting a label. But dharma remains, we cannot reject it. As Dr Radhakrishnan puts it: 'Dharma is truth's embodiment in life and the power to refashion our nature' (*Religion and Society*, 1947, p. 104).

The emergence of new values and ethics is a spiritual phenomenon, an awakening. It is spiritual values that activate and regulate human action for quality improvement of the workplace, the home, the society, and for the quality of the environment we live in in the cosmos.

Hindu scriptures says that life has a two-fold purpose, one *abhyudaya* and the other *niḥśreyasa*. *Abhyudaya* is rising higher and higher in physical, material, and intellectual terms all the time. The spirit of *abhyudaya* impels us not to stay stuck where we are. We should never say, 'Oh, I have had enough. I don't need to go further.' Rather, the whole purpose of life is to move on: *caraiyeti*. The 'divine discontent' inherent in us urges us to go forward, to know more, to achieve higher and higher things. As we reach higher and

higher, we reach a point when we feel, 'I have everything; I have achieved everything I wanted to. And yet I am not happy.' Here we come to the stage of seeking *niḥśreyasa*. This state is interpreted in Hindu philosophy as Self-realization or God-realization. So, talking of values, we are always moving from lower to higher values.

Illumination often comes from the deepest crisis. What we are experiencing in our national life these days is a passing phase when we have lost sight of the most precious values. But perennial values like *satyam*, *śivam* and *advaitam* can never be lost. They are inherent in dharma or religion and have given man uniqueness among all beings. Religion is often used to comfort the troubled, but a true religion will also trouble the comfortable. When religion troubles the comfortable, we get a Buddha, a Christ, or a Vivekananda. It is time spiritual leadership mustered all its courage and shook off complacency. They need not feel scared, for they have nothing to lose. India, and for that matter the world, needs them now more to show the light which emanates from enduring values. And the source of these values is Truth-Knowledge-Bliss: *sat-cit-ānanda*. □

Swami Vivekananda's Idea of Painting

Once Swami Vivekananda was invited to a famous theatrical hall in France. Its drop scenes were painted by a renowned painter. The paintings of this artist and this particular stage were then foremost among all the then paintings and theatres in Paris. Swamiji knew French and could follow the drama played before him. All of a sudden he noticed some part of the screen which revealed some technical mistakes which could have been improved. When the play was over, he called the manager and with him came the artists who were eager to learn the impressions of this honoured and renowned guest. When he pointed out the technical defects in the scene, they were astonished, for the scene in question was supposed to be a masterpiece, and the defect could not be detected even by trained eyes. The artist owned it and was highly pleased to learn Swamiji's suggestion about the harmony of expressions in the figures, thinking that he knew as much of the technique of painting as of any other subject.

—retold from *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

What is the meaning of 'giving the mind a higher turn'?

Longing and desire for various material things distract the mind. To overcome this, one of the best possible ways is to change the course of the mind. To turn the mind towards God is known as giving it a higher turn.

Is practice needed for self-surrender also?

Yes, you have to practise self-surrender. Practice is needed to reach the state of total surrender (*śaraṇāgati*). Sustained practice will increase the mind's mood of self-abnegation. Say in your prayers, 'I am surrendering myself at your feet. I shall be happy in whatever way you keep me.' That is how we should pray. Sri Ramakrishna has taught us how to pray. There are wonderful prayers in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Repeat mentally, 'I surrender, I surrender,' while surrendering yourself to Him. Sri Ramakrishna has shown us how to do it. One of his beautiful prayers is this [*Gospel*, p. 731]:

O Mother, I throw myself on Thy mercy; I take shelter at Thy hallowed feet. I do not want bodily comforts; I do not crave name and fame; I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by any selfish ends—a love craved by the devotee for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O Mother, that I may not be deluded

by Thy world-bewitching maya, that I may never be attached to the world, to 'woman and gold', conjured up by Thy inscrutable maya! O Mother, there is no one but Thee whom I may call my own. Mother, I do not know how to worship; I am without austerity; I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother, and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy lotus feet.

Maharaj, is there any difference between other works and those related to God?

Initially they appear to be different, but once the mind attains a higher state, all differences disappear. '*Yat karomi jaganmātaḥ tadeva tava pūjanam*, O Mother of the universe, whatever I do is nothing but your worship.' This should be our attitude. There is a Bengali song of Ramprasad to the same tune: 'I consider lying down as offering salutations; sleep is meditation on Mother; while eating, I think I am giving sacrificial offering to Mother.'

Persistent efforts will help; isn't that true, Maharaj?

Quite right. Imagine the complexity of talking even! Our speech requires a complex and coordinated movement of thought as well as so many muscles. Speech too has developed after persistent practice. A little girl used to come here. Her name was Sutapa. She could never utter her name correctly. I tried to teach her. I said, 'Say "Su"' and she did. I

asked to her to repeat 'ta' and that too she did. Finally, I said 'pa' and she did that also. But when pronouncing all the three syllables together, she would commit the same error: she would say, 'Supata.' However, as she grew older she overcame her deficiency.

Are karma yoga and serveing Siva in jīva one and the same?

There is a subtle difference. To 'serve Siva in jīva' means to maintain the attitude that Siva is present in all those whom we serve, whereas selfless work (*niṣkāma karma*) means action done without any selfish desire, without desire for any result. So the two are not quite the same.

How should we serve God?

Repeat His name; that itself is a great service. Further, there is always the scope of serving people and other beings living around. Go ahead and serve them. Try to maintain the right attitude in service.

Maharaj, it is said that good actions bring merit or punya while wrong actions bring sin. To whom is this rule applicable?

It is for those who feel, 'I am the doer.' Among the rest, an insane person is not responsible for his actions.

Do materialists too perform selfless work?

Yes, they may. When materialists who do not believe in God perform actions with indifference to results of their actions, their actions also can be called selfless actions.

I have heard it said, 'We attain God when we renounce all actions.' What is meant by this?

All actions cease with the attainment of God. This means, when attachment for God grows, the mind will have no more attraction for worldly duties. Sri Ramakrishna says that an insane person is not responsible for his actions. So when one becomes mad for God, duties cease to exist for him.

They say that we can achieve our supreme end through detachment (vairāgya) and practice (abhyāsa). Will you please explain this?

Detachment means bringing the mind away from the objects of the senses, and practice is repeated effort to fix the detached mind on God. Through detachment and practice, the mind becomes strong in spiritual aspiration and we advance towards God. Apart from this we should practise meditation, japa, prayer, etc and also adhere to good conduct.

Maharaj, what is good conduct?

Good conduct means following the five *yamas* and the five *niyamas* stipulated in Yoga. Again, it means not to deceive anyone, to make conscious effort at plain living without over-indulgence, and to concentrate on internal purity rather than giving emphasis to external details. More than these, it means holding on to Truth at all costs.

How to put the servant attitude into practice?

Try to follow the attitude that you are His servant, that He is present both within you and in everything around you. Since you call yourself a servant, you are obliged to render service.

Why is it said that we should transcend even the sattva quality?

When even the *sattva guṇa* is transcended, the mind becomes absolutely free from desires and unholy thoughts. He who transcends the *sattva guṇa* has indeed reached God.

Maharaj, what is the importance of Dussera (Daśaharā)?

They say that bathing in the Ganges on the day of Daśaharā will absolve you of the accumulated sins of ten lives! Worshipping the Ganga during this period is propitious, they say.

—compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

Economic Transition in India: A Survey

SWAMI TYAGARUPANANDA & DR SUJIT KUMAR GHOSH

Two accomplished scholars in economics jointly present a methodical yet brief analysis of the economic condition in India during the previous millennium. Swami Tyagarupananda, an economics expert, and Dr Sujit Ghosh, an author of several works, both teach at the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur Math.

While tracing medieval Indian economic history during the previous millennium, historians are of the opinion that the collected historical materials are exceedingly fragmentary and difficult to interpret. The early Middle Ages was a period of general economic decline in the northern part of the subcontinent coupled with an opposite economic scenario in the coastal parts of Gujarat and the Coromandel. Some modern historians have noted a turning point in Indian economic history around 1000 CE when survival of gold coinage and revival of bullion and copper coinage reflected a modest upsurge of mercantile activities. Subsequently the Moghul empire in its halcyon days imposed on the greater part of the subcontinent a fair amount of political unity along with a centralized administration, a uniform revenue policy, a network of inland trade and active encouragement to an expanding overseas commerce, thereby infusing a growth momentum that had a snowballing effect across the different regions.

In the middle of the 18th century India was passing through recurrent crises in its history when the decline of central authority tempted a number of contenders to compete with each other for political supremacy, inviting economic and administrative disruption. Certain economic transformations had already started occurring within the country in the 15th and 16th centuries when geographical discoveries and the gradual improvement

in oceanic transport brought India in close touch with the developing countries of Western Europe. But by mid-18th century, with the decline of the Moghul empire, a sharp economic trend set in.

A really epoch-making phase came around mid-19th century; and up till that turning point in history, for thousands of years, agricultural production was the mainstay of the internal economy of India. It had been carried on by subsistence farming organized in small village communities. A village was more or less a self-sufficient economic unit and its business contacts with the outside world were limited to payment of land revenue, generally in kind, to the king and purchase of a few necessities of life from village fairs and towns.

Transition since Mid-19th Century

Since mid-19th century, there gradually started an acceleration of the process of breakdown of the self-sufficient compact character of the village economy as an aftermath of transport and commercial revolutions and the changes in property relations around that time. Of course, revolution in property relations had already started occurring in India towards the end of the 18th century. Regarding the impact of British rule on the change in social fabric of Indian agriculture, some Indian historians blame aspects of British land revenue administration—like high revenue demand, insistence on cash crops and relative

inflexibility of land revenue—for rural impoverishment. These writers, thinking in terms of structural changes in Indian agriculture, stress on the establishment of private property rights on land, the creation and multiplication of a class of parasitic landlords, and the increasing pressure of rent and rural indebtedness as the factors which came to exacerbate the crisis in rural economy. These factors in the context of the evolution of a cash economy and the growth of commercialization of agriculture consequent upon transport revolution and increasing profitability of cultivation of commercial crops, caused large scale alienation of peasant holdings resulting in a situation where peasants ceased to be self-sufficient producers, now depending for their subsistence on agricultural wage and share-cropping. Thus gradually came to crystallize a process of specialization emanating out of the advantages of localization in various fields of agricultural production, and this along with the evolving system of market-oriented production ultimately led to an outright conversion of the self-sufficient co-operative character of the village economy into the individualistic, competitive spirit of the newly emerging commercialized agriculture.

After all, the pre-British agrarian society and system differed from that which evolved during British rule particularly through the transition period around mid-19th century. During this period, the apparently small peasant economy as the basic organization of agricultural production and the continuity of certain agrarian institutions concealed a significant process of change. The nature of decisive influences arising out of immediate administrative policies of the British rulers and institutional innovations affecting the agrarian society during British rule, obviously changed over time. All these changes in the land system brought in chaos and disorder in agrarian relations that practically ruined Indian agriculture. In fact, through such a process of change, a decadent feudal order was

somehow bolstered up, where the be-all and end-all of British economic policies was to meet the basic requirements of colonial trade and administration by making India an agricultural appendage of Great Britain and a market for British manufacturers.

Before the advent of modern industries like jute, cotton textile, iron and steel, etc during the second half of the 19th century, India was the industrial workshop of the world because of her highly organized handicrafts. The transplantation of Western-type modern industries on the soil of Indian economy was oriented more towards maximization of colonial trade benefits than towards spreading out the growth effects of such few manufacturing units through inter-industrial repercussions. With the emergence of factory civilization covering modern industry, mines and transport, the currency of the country also needed a radical reorganization, and much headway was made in the field of currency management through transformation of gold exchange standard into gold bullion standard in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Industrial prosperity of that period was nurtured and enriched by the flow of both domestic and foreign capital and enterprises and the expansionary forces multiplied through the stimulating effects of the First World War that generated profitable outlets for industrial investment. Further, the War brought home to the British government the urgency of giving a big push to indigenous industrial growth and for the very sake of survival of British hegemony against the onslaught of non-British forces in the Indian market. Hence in the inter-War period there was a resurgence of economic growth galvanized by a set of new policy measures to that effect. Nevertheless, it was not till the period after independence that, with the birth of a new, planned economy in India, a balanced and all-comprehensive economic develop-

ment could fructify.

Transition since Independence

As a sequel to the successful application of the concept of economic planning in Soviet economy in their post-Revolution period, establishing for the first time the efficacy of planning before the world, Indian administrators and policy-makers deemed it wise to go the same way in laying the foundation for a healthy economic growth for India. With this end in view, the First Five Year Plan got off to its promising start in 1951. In that plan, agriculture enjoyed the pride of position, and the major thrust was towards maximizing the long-run rate of growth of national income through maximization of savings and its channelization into productive investment. In fact, the savings booster started operating since this Plan onward and agricultural production targets were more than fulfilled.

Thereafter, a very important landmark in the history of planning in this country came with the announcement of the heavy industry strategy-based Second Five Year Plan in 1956. Iron and steel industries, machine-manufacturing industries and heavy engineering industries fall within the category of the so-called heavy industry or investment goods sector. The rapid expansion of such industries goes a long way towards creating a sound base for modern industrialization and future economic growth. This prompted the Indian government to allocate a major portion of total plan expenditure in favour of this heavy industry sector and the result was astounding insofar as the annual rate of industrial growth soared up to around 7.8% during 1955-65. Moreover, the range of industrial production remarkably widened which found its reflection in the diversification of the export structure. This strategy of Indian planning owes its origin to the pioneering work of Prof P.C. Mahalanobis, whose aim was also to increase employment opportunities through the expansion of small-scale and cottage industries

alongside the growth of large-scale modern factory giants. Further, the maximization of future benefits in terms of maximum possible long-run growth of aggregate consumption accompanying the long-run growth of income and employment, also figured prominently in the spectrum of Mahalanobis' strategy of planning.

One disturbing trend here is that this strategy somehow or other ended up with a disproportionality crisis where agriculture had to suffer a setback owing to overemphasis on industry. Agricultural instability that made itself felt in acute food, price and foreign exchange crises practically hastened up the evolution of a new agricultural production technology, adding a new dimension to the then Indian plan strategy. This new technology, based on the application of high-yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers and water that evolved in the second half of the 60s, virtually opened up a new vista in the frontier of agricultural production. This ultimately resulted in a rapid rise in yield per acre (the 'Green Revolution'), particularly in the wheat-growing regions of the country, thereby ushering in an era of near self-sufficiency in food—significantly whittling down food imports. However, the paradox of such development lies in the fact that benefits of increased income and production in the agricultural sector hardly trickled down to the lower and wider strata of the rural community. Such inequity problems in the agricultural sector created the urgency of land reforms for which we have yet a long way to go. The Green Revolution in Indian agriculture, albeit with limited initial geographical and crop average, has been expanding spatially over time. At the same time multiple-cropping and crop-rotation have also helped agricultural dynamization in the economy.

Transition since 1970

There came another phase of economic transition in India during the 70s. For the first

time in the history of Indian planning, there was a major shift of emphasis from growth to development with the initiation of the Fifth Five Year Plan in 1974. So far there was an expectation that if growth occurs, better employment and fair distribution would ultimately follow in its wake. But this expectation came to be totally belied, as unemployment and price crises deepened in spite of a substantial increase in national income. Hence, since 1974 our approach to economic planning involved a direct frontal attack on poverty and unemployment. A number of direct employment-generating, income-creating projects were launched at that time. But the irony of fate was that during the first half of the 70s the economy had a harrowing experience of economic stagnation accompanied by skyrocketing of inflationary price spiral. The onset of the oil crisis and industrial recession cast a dismal lengthening shadow on the economy. All such stultifying forces for the planners, of course, became juxtaposed with a heartening phenomenon on the trade front where a sharp rise in exports of non-traditional items such as engineering, chemical and metallurgical products, as also in the exports of services, caused a phenomenal improvement in the foreign trade situation. Another glitter in the otherwise dark side of economic life was the attainment of high savings—so much so that Indian economy at the end of the 70s came to be characterized as a 'high-saving' economy, nearly $\frac{1}{4}$ of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country being saved in 1979-80.

The course of Indian economic history took a new turn through the 80s. In fact, in course of the long stretch of time, spanning over the first three decades of Indian planning experiment, a phase of cramping restrictions and regulations, in one form or another, continued to dominate the economic scene of the country. The basic rationale of such regulation must lie in the necessity for preservation and growth of domestic industries keeping

the extent of dependence on foreign aid to a minimum. But excesses of regulations let loose various morbid designs like manifold types of corrupt practices, red-tapism and managerial and administrative complications coupled with loss of efficiency and distortion of incentive structure. This called for gradual liberalization and selective deregulation through the 80s embracing diverse areas of economic activities covering monetary, fiscal and foreign trade sectors. This was expected also to encourage cost-consciousness in a purely competitive and market-friendly setup and to increase international competitiveness of the Indian economy, particularly when our share in world trade was fast eroding and the mounting external liability loomed large at the beginning of the 90s.

Against such a historical backdrop, one can appreciate fully the significance of the sweeping changes attending upon the announcement of new economic reform measures in July 1991. Subsequent to this announcement, a new horizon was opened up on the canvas of Indian economy through trade liberalization, financial sector reforms, fiscal and industrial liberalization. This new policy approach was meant for, among other things, exploiting fully the comparative advantages the economy enjoys in the production of export items, whereby the domestic producers and consumers can get access to larger international market and thus have a wider set of choices. Further, the programmes of economic liberalization and globalization yield the benefits through liberalized transfers of improved technology, foreign capital and resources from the developed countries, thereby helping bridge the productivity gap between domestic and foreign industries. For example, software, automobile and consumer durables have received a major forward thrust through such liberalization programmes. Moreover, many types of imports of raw materials, intermediates and capital goods have been liberalized through disman-

tling of the tariff structure in a bid to promote exports which essentially require such imports. Such imports are also oriented towards boosting up the productive capacity of the domestic economy where imports are substitutes of domestic capital.

Since the 1991 economic reforms, the Indian economy has been growing strongly enhancing India's integration with the global economy and accelerating the overall growth of national income. Foreign exchange reserves have inched up, savings ratio has also increased substantially and Indian economy has attained a high stage of technological maturity. But this progress was punctuated by a shortlived phase of deceleration after 1996-97 with slackening of both agricultural and industrial growth rates. Therefore, to sustain the impact of economic reforms pursued so far, the government needs to broaden and deepen structural reforms, keeping in view the exigency of a sustainable growth for the years ahead. Inadequate progress in reforms of labour market and state-owned enterprises, as also in poverty alleviation, infrastructural development and human resource development programmes still remain formidable challenges.

India today needs a generic approach to development, synchronizing human development, tempered with empowerment of women and the masses on the one hand, and economic regeneration on the other. This has also been aptly recognized in the Approach Note of the Ninth Five Year Plan. It is here that we can find the relevance of the transcendental thought-waves flowing from the lofty ideas and thinking of the great seers of our land. One of the most dynamic and all-pervasive thought-movements of the past century stemmed from the socio-economic sermons of Swami Vivekananda, the great patriot-saint of India. His sermons to the nation is modernization of agriculture, industry and trade, drawing upon the stock of modern sci-

entific and technological knowledge on the one hand, and harnessing of the massive human resource potential for a broad-based development, founded on socialistic and democratic edifice, on the other. Swamiji long back predicted the rising of the proletariat during the last century and his predictions have come true. His ideas on socio-economic reforms virtually serve as a beacon-light for our onward march toward the dawn of the new era. The animated act of the elevation of the economy from its quasi-moribund stage of yesteryears and giving it an ongoing character for the years to come finds its abiding source of inspiration in the teachings of the great Swamiji.

Bibliography

1. *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (Vol. 1): 1200-1750, ed. Tapan Roy Chowdhury and Irfan Habib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
2. *The Cambridge Economic History of India* (Vol. 2): 1757-1970, ed. Dharam Kumar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
3. *Economic History of India: 1857-1956*, ed. V.B. Singh (Allied Publishers, 1965).
4. Dhires Bhattacharya, *A Concise History of Indian Economy: 1750-1950* (Prentice-Hall India, 1979).
5. Dr Radhakamal Mukherjee, *Foundation of Indian Economy* (London: Longman, 1916).
6. *A Comprehensive History of India*, ed. Dr R.C. Majumdar (People's Publishing House, 1981-82).
7. *Asian Development Outlook 1997-98: Asian Development Bank* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

8. *Indian Economic Survey: 1997-98, Pre-Budget 1998-99 Document* (Government of India).

9. *Economic Survey: 1993-94* (Government of India).

10. Sukhomoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

11. *The Indian Economy*, ed. Bimal Jalan (Penguin Books, 1993). □

How to Win God's Grace?

Go on making regular japa and along with japa, pray with all humility: 'Lord, bless me so that I may meditate on You and so that my mind may lose itself at Your lotus feet.' And He is sure to do so, rest assured. He is the guru in everybody's heart—the Guide, Master, Father, Mother, Friend, in fact everything to a man. All for whom people cry in this world, thinking they are their own, will live for a few days only; the eternal companion is He alone.

Go on repeating His name with full sincerity, and you will find that meditation will follow as a natural development. When one goes on repeating the name of the chosen Deity with intense love, one becomes gradually filled with an ineffable bliss. When that bliss becomes continuous, it is also a kind of meditation. Meditations are of various kinds. Go on meditating on the blessed, effulgent form of the Lord with the greatest love, and imagine that every recess of your heart shines with the light emanating from His form. As you go on thinking thus, you will feel that your whole being becomes suffused with inexpressible joy. Gradually the form also will get dissolved, and you will have the feeling of a kind of bliss associated with consciousness. This also is a kind of meditation.

There are innumerable other kinds of meditation which you will yourself come to know by stages. The main thing that counts is to call on Him with all sincerity. As you go on calling on Him and weeping for Him, all the dirt in your mind will be washed away, and it will become purified. Then, that pure mind itself will act as guru to you. You will get all the answers from within yourself to all the questions that you may have—about what you need at a particular time, how you should meditate, how you should call on Him, and all such things. You must have read what the Master used to say: 'The breeze of divine grace is blowing all the time; it is for you to unfurl your sail.' This unfurling of the sail means undertaking spiritual practices with sincere diligence. He is ever eager to bestow His grace, just as a mother keeps her hands always ready to take up the child to her lap. Do try a bit, and then only will you feel how compassionate He is.

In the beginning it is good to fix a definite number for the daily japa. It should not be less than a thousand each time in your case; if you can increase that number, it will be still better. As you repeat the mantra of the chosen Deity, think of His form as well; thus you can have both japa and meditation simultaneously. Once you have the yearning in your mind, success is near at hand.

—Swami Shivananda

What is Solid Yet Subtle?

BABAJI BOB KINDLER

Babaji Bob Kindler from Hawaii, USA, is an admirer of Sarada, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda's ideals. He teaches and writes on Vedanta and other related subjects. He is also well known as a singer. Of his books, The Avadhut and His Twenty-four Teachers in Nature is a recent one. In this article Babaji discusses Sakti from the Vedantic and Tantric viewpoints.

In an attempt to describe the density of matter which is the enigma of *māyā*—a combined display of the power of Śakti and the subtlety of Brahman—Sri Ramakrishna has stated, 'How has Satchidānanda become so hard? The earth does indeed feel very hard to the touch. The answer is that...everything is possible for God' (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 395).

In the *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* (verse 482), Śrī Śaṅkara gives a beautiful illustration of the vision of Brahman by declaring this: 'The boundless expanse of pure Consciousness called Brahman, replete with the nectar-like swell of the Atman, into which my mind melted like a hailstone falling into the ocean, getting fully immersed and dissolved there, is entirely impossible to describe or fathom.' It is this kind of unique attempt at a description of Reality that best indicates what Sri Ramakrishna has tried to express. Next to or compared with pure Consciousness, even thought is a dense substance, what to speak of physical matter consisting of the five elements. The idea is that all things come from Consciousness, It being the basic and primal substance from which various principles formulate and into which they get dissolved. To understand this better, some essential portions of the Vedanta and Tantra philosophy must be taken up for study.

From the standpoint of the Absolute or the state of *parā*, all things, including the subtlest elements of our being, such as intelligence, are Brahman. This is the first and high-

est state of things where everything is unmanifest, contained in a conditionless state of absolute unity without boundaries or divisions. It is vibrationless essence, existing ever in an excellent state which the sages have called *nitya-śuddha-bodha-rūpa*, among other names—the very embodiment of eternally pure and perfect Being.

Next, in a stage called 'looking out', known as *paśyantī*, the undifferentiated Brahman forms an extremely subtle dimension which It fills with pure intelligence, still in embryonic state and unformed with regard to ideas or thought. This is the beginning of a divine cogitation phase out of which magnificent spiritual, cosmic, and physical imperatives will eventually emerge. The three *guṇas* or modes of nature, and thus the cosmic principles one after another, come into being. The states of waking, dream and deep sleep, the triune web of time, space and causality too are formed at this stage.

A third stage occurs next, called the *madhyamā* or 'intermediary' phase. In it, a force of divine Will is brought to bear which causes ideas and thoughts to form, emerging from pure Intelligence. However, nothing solid or determinate is yet forthcoming into manifestation. In this stage, names and forms are associated with each other, as are words and meanings, though all is seed-like, in the form of ideation.

Finally, in the *vaikhārī* or 'rudimentary' phase, all manner of variety tumbles forth into manifestation and expresses in multitu-

dinous fashion. This is the realm where thought has become solid, transformed from subtle vibration into a more densely vibrating set of substances. In other words, matter is thought made manifest in substance—subtle energy in a gross form. What is beyond the senses, then, nevertheless exists. A high frequency, for instance, though inaudible to the human ear due to its swift rate of vibration, is still present. A dog reacts noticeably to it though human ears fail to perceive it. Likewise, there is much which the human mind and senses cannot perceive, but this does not mean that they do not exist.

Therefore we can understand Sri Ramakrishna's statement above in a new and more profound light. These four modes of manifestation from pure Consciousness—*parā*, *paśyanti*, *madhyamā*, and *vaikhari*—explain the creation from the standpoint of vibration and expression proceeding from the subtle to the gross. It is in this unique way, as Sri Ramakrishna explains above, that Satchidānanda 'becomes solid.'

Put in simpler terms by Sri Sarada Devi, 'The entire universe is mind made manifest.' This statement gives us even deeper insight into the nature of Reality and Its expression from a slightly different angle. From this viewpoint we find that thought, a subtle vibration, can solidify and assume a slower vibrational rate. The result is a denser form of expression called matter, and using the four-fold process described above, we find out how the universe of name and form came into existence.

Using Tantric terminology, pure Consciousness in a dynamic mode (*icchā-śakti*) wills to give birth and uses the pure Intelligence inherent in It (*citi-śakti*) to create thought-force (*cit-śakti*). This power creates a boundless ocean of subtle seed ideas which gradually formulate concepts such as space, time, causality and other monumental cosmic imperatives. The potential for an infinite amount of lesser cosmic principles called *tattvas* and the possibility of an endless stretch

of subtle and material vibrational realms spring from these grand concepts. When the cosmic garden is thus planted, being tended and infused with knowledge by the power of the Word and its wisdom (*jñāna-śakti*, anthropomorphically represented as Sarasvatī), causal, astral and physical worlds spring forth in order. The great Power's (*Mahāśakti*) animating energy (*kriyā-śakti*), equipped with activated *prāṇa*, sensory abilities and other forces, then pervades the atmospheres while solid mass gives way to expression through the creative material force (*dravya-śakti*), welding the interacting five elements of ether, air, fire, water, and earth.

Mahāśakti or Mahāmāyā, identical with Brahman, and who is the sum total of all *śaktis*, uses dream-force (*māyā-śakti*) to fabricate causal, astral and physical realms. Inherent therein, such aspects as *dik-śakti*, *kāla-śakti* and *karma-śakti*—the powers that create the appearance of space, time and activity—function accordingly, as well as the form of dream-illusion itself called *svapna-māyā-swarūpa*. These also operate in a more rudimentary form on the physical plane where dreaming is narrow and confined to desire (*kāma-śakti*) greatly due to belief in the reality of the world (*dirgha-svapna*). This thick, potent power of Brahman's Mahāśakti causes an imaginary rift in Consciousness which attaches beings to their senses (*viśaya*), to the sense of ownership, to insentient matter (*pramucchedaka-prakṛti-bandha*), to the body rather than Spirit (*parasparādhyāsa*), to forgetfulness (*mudhāvasthā*), to imperfect perception (*doṣadr̥ṣṭi*) and to the triple desire of wealth, spouse and children (*eṣaṇātrayam*). Thus, Consciousness in varying degrees of intensity, abiding within the many multi-tiered cosmic systems filled with various types of bodies and objects, temporarily inhabits these forms and life in relativity goes on as planned by the master Architect of the universal scheme.

Here, then, is the key to the mystery of creation, logical and comprehensive, complex

but clear, inclusive of both the necessary practical components and the essential ingredient—Brahman. Whereas the six-day theory of creation accepted in the Old and New Testaments, and the theory of evolution proposed by contemporary scientists are both plausible and possible, the above truth, presented throughout the width and breadth of Eastern philosophy, is fully satisfying and sensible. It allows for evolution and involution as well as a series of divinely-willed creations within an endless stretch of time in a boundless expanse of space, both physical and subtle. In retrospect, events and discoveries throughout history, verified by excavation and carbon dating as well as the many unexplainable spiritual phenomena which have taken place throughout the march of time, have suitable basis for existence and proof of validity. Here, both God and the materials and forces by which the process of creation, preservation and destruction are initiated and maintained find common ground and reconciliation.

Speaking in terms of the physical universe alone and in accordance with Sri Ramakrishna's above statement, it is out of subtle elements like human blood that such great manifestations like the human body and nervous system get born and grow. This is a mystery, unexplainable in any satisfactory detail by scientists, historians, doctors or clergy. What is more, after the development of body and brain, such subtle yet mighty principles like thought and intelligence burst forth and take expression. This is nothing short of miraculous and should not be taken for granted or covered over by secular mechanics, fundamental dualistic religion or sterile scientific analysis and terminology. The sacred must be retained in the mind's awareness and kept sight of. It alone is responsible for all that beings experience, since It alone has become all beings. As the Great Master has said, 'All is possible for God.' □

A Great Historian on Swami Vivekananda

Even now, a hundred years after the birth of Narendranath Dutta, who later became Swami Vivekananda, it is very difficult to evaluate his importance in the scale of world history. It is certainly far greater than any Western historian or most Indian historians would have suggested at the time of his death. The passing of the years and the many stupendous and unexpected events which occurred since then suggests that in centuries to come he will be remembered as one of the main moulders of the modern world, especially as far as Asia is concerned, and as one of the most significant figures in the whole history of Indian religion, comparable in importance to such great teachers as Shankara and Ramanuja, and definitely more important than the saints of local or regional significance such as Kabir, Chaitanya and many Nayanmars and Alvars of South India.

I believe also that Vivekananda will always be remembered in the world's history because he virtually initiated what the late Dr C.E.M. Joad once called 'counter attack from the East.' Since the days of the Indian missionaries who travelled in Southeast Asia and China preaching Buddhism and Hinduism more than a thousand years earlier, he was the first Indian religious teacher to make an impression outside India.

—Dr A.L. Basham, author of *The Wonder that was India*

Gift

'Your son's horoscope reads something astounding. He has the prospect of becoming both a king and a spiritual master,' said the astrologer. The father smiled at his wife. She looked at her baby-son, who was looking at her with a smile on his face.

★★★★★

Narahari was sad that day. His spiritual master was leaving shortly. He tried to persuade the master to stay on for a little more time. But the master couldn't. Narahari thought the whole day about this. The next day, he went to the teacher, prostrated before him, and said, 'Venerable sir, I too shall accompany you.' The compassionate teacher replied, 'No, Narahari, you needn't. You have work to do here. Stay back.' Narahari remonstrated, 'Venerable sir, I haven't been able to serve your holy feet at all. I shall be deprived of this great opportunity of serving my guru. Please permit me to go with you.' The sweet argument continued for a while. At last, the teacher said, 'Narahari, you don't understand. I am not taking you with me only because I have some desire. And you too say that you intend serving your guru...' Narahari's eyes brightened. An opportunity to serve his spiritual master! 'Yes, my gurudeva! I shall certainly carry out your orders. How fortunate I am to be able to serve you!'

The teacher slowly said, 'You see, Narahari. My desire is only this. In the king's collection is the image of Rama and Sita which was worshipped by saints in the past. I desire to install the image once more. Your work is to procure it from the king.' The teacher's voice was compassionate, but he appeared serious. For an instant, even Narahari was taken aback. If it was anyone else Narahari would have said straightaway, 'No, I can't do this.' Who ever can go to the king and ask for something which is securely kept in his treas-

ury? Narahari was worried.

'You appear to be worried, isn't it, Narahari? Dear child, this is a test of your faith in God. Do you think anything is impossible for God? Pray to Him with yearning, and He will show the way.' Narahari silently nodded. He would indeed accomplish the impossible task if only he had the grace of God and the blessings of the teacher. 'Venerable sir, while on the one hand my heart pants to obey your orders, on the other, there is some hesitation because of the apparent impossibility of the task. But still, I shall rather die than not carry out your instructions.'

The day his spiritual master and entourage left, Narahari was in tears. The teacher also was moved. 'My child, be not worried in the least. Pray to Him. I am sure you will accomplish the task I have given you. Take care.'

★★★★★

For days Narahari struggled to overcome his sorrow; how unfortunate he was at not being able to be near his beloved guru! However, he had orders and they were to be carried out. No doubt Narahari worked as an officer in the Orissa king's palace. No doubt all revered him for his learning and purity of conduct. Yet, would the young Gajapati king agree to part with the Sita-Rama idol? 'My God, may I be able to fulfill my guru's orders,' was Narahari's only prayer.

God's ways are astounding. Some days later, the Gajapati king had an attack of some strange disease. All medical help failed to bring him around. One day, even as everyone looked on with tearful eyes, the king passed away. The queen was inconsolable. Moreover, she was carrying the king's child. The country was now without a king and there was no heir as yet. There was a subtle feud; everyone wanted to occupy the throne. At last

it was decided that the royal elephant would carry a garland on its trunk. It would garland someone of its choice, and that person would become king till the queen gave birth to the child and the heir came of age. The elephant took the garland, passed by all the aspirants, and walked forward. Narahari was a bystander, just watching the event. And, wonder of wonders, the elephant garlanded Narahari!

Poor Narahari! He never imagined he would become a king. But he had to rule the kingdom now. With his sincerity, devotion to God and piety, Narahari proved to be an excellent ruler. The queen gave birth to a son. Narahari waited for the boy to grow up; he never coveted the kingdom. He only saw to it that the boy became an adept in all arts. And one morning, he handed over the kingship to the prince. 'You have ruled the kingdom very well indeed, revered sir. What do you want as a reward?' asked the new king. Narahari bowed down before the king and said, 'May it please you, my lord, to present me the image of Sita and Rama, which is in the royal stores.' That was done. At last, Narahari had the image his teacher had wanted. He was so happy. He would take it soon to his teacher. He told the king, 'My lord, permit me to leave this country and go over to some other place.' The king was sad. 'I am young and inexperienced. Will you forsake me at this juncture and go away?' Narahari was moved, but couldn't help. After some days of hesitation, the king at last agreed to send Narahari away. He gave so many presents to Narahari which the latter politely rejected. The king was surprised at Narahari's renunciation. He was ruling this country for so long; yet he remained a simple brahmin, without wanting anything except an image! The king forced Narahari to accept some gifts at least.

★★★★★

'Revered sir! Revered sir!' The spiritual teacher was in meditation then. Though he felt disturbed, he knew that the young novice wouldn't have disturbed him had there not

been some special news. 'Yes, my lad?' questioned the teacher. 'Some brahmin is here. He appears to have come from a very far-off place. He says that he is your disciple.'

The teacher stood up and embraced Narahari even before Narahari had the opportunity to touch his master's feet. 'I waited all these days, dear Narahari. I knew you would bring them to me. Where are Rama and Sita?' Narahari bowed down, and made him a present of the image. With great reverence, the spiritual master placed the image on a platform and bowed down. Narahari was worried because the teacher appeared emaciated. 'Narahari, don't worry about me. I was only waiting for you. I have decided to go away to Badarikashram...' The disciple was stunned. Narahari stood with bowed head and tried to argue. But he knew that the teacher was determined.

There were festivities for more than three months in the monastery. The teacher personally worshipped the sacred image every day for 80 days. Narahari had the opportunity all these days to serve his guru to his heart's content. Finally, the teacher said, 'Narahari, I am pleased with your service. I have one more desire.' The disciple eagerly waited to know what his master wanted of him. 'For some days, immerse yourself in austerities. Later on, you will have to take over my chair.'

'No, my gurudeva!' cried Narahari. He was shocked at his teacher's proposal. With so many venerable monks around, should he be chosen? But the teacher wouldn't listen. He said sweetly, 'Will you not obey your guru's instructions?... Not immediately of course, but sometime later.' Narahari was silent.

The day of parting came. The founder of the school of Dualism, Madhvacharya, left for Badarikashram while everyone looked on with tears in their eyes. He placed Padmanabha Tirtha on the teacher's seat. A few years later, Narahari, who became Narahari Tirtha, became the teacher. The astrologer was true indeed! □

Book Reviews

THE INTEGRAL ADVAITISM OF SRI AUROBINDO: By Sri Rama Shankar Misra. Published by Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110007. 1998. Pp. 438. Rs.495.

Prof R.S. Misra is an erudite scholar, having taught philosophy at the Benares Hindu University for nearly three decades. His explanation of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is comprehensive, systematic, unambiguous and forceful. The author's view on Sri Aurobindo's philosophy are enumerated below:

Sri Aurobindo, like Sri Sankara, says that there is a fundamental Reality behind the universe. But while according to Sankara Brahman alone is real and the world and the individual are products of Maya, Sri Aurobindo says that the world and the individual are real as Brahman. Sri Aurobindo calls his new system of philosophy Integral Advaita, wherein the contradictions between the Infinite and the finite, the One and the many, Being and becoming, Indeterminate and determinate, Self and not-Self, are all resolved. He feels that Sankara's philosophy of the unreality of the world has led some unripe minds to deny materialism, and indulge in perverted superstition and irrational dogmatism, which has had its toll on our nation. There may be some truth in his contention.

According to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, human birth is a complex of two elements—a spiritual person and a soul of personality, or in other words, an eternal being and a cosmic, mutable being. As a spirit he is one with the transcendence which is immanent in the world and as a soul he is a part of the Absolute self-expressed in the world. His self-expression must go through the stages of cosmic expression and his soul experience should follow the revolutions of the wheel of Brahman in the universe.

The existence of the Self needs no proof, it being the ground of all proofs. The Brahman or the Absolute manifests itself as the triune principle of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. In its aspect of self-existence, Satchidananda manifests in three forms as Atman, Purusha and Iswara. The dynamic aspects of these manifestations are Maya, Prakriti, and Shakti respectively. All our activities are the play of the above-mentioned triple forces, technically called *iccha-shakti*, *kriya-shakti* and

jnana-shakti. These three streams originate from a power called *adya-shakti*. Matter is thus reduced to a fundamental energy. Consciousness is present in everything, including plants and matter, but its presence in them is latent. Nothing can evolve out of matter which is not already contained therein. Even the atom and the electron are eternal somnambulists, always on the point of waking but never waking. Thus consciousness is the supreme fundamental principle underlying the world and directing its operations.

The idea conforms to the findings of modern science. 'World existence is the eternal dance of Shiva. Its sole object is the joy of dancing. The spontaneous vibration of Shiva, the ultimate Reality, gives rise to the world of distinctions,' says Sri Aurobindo. The famous modern synthesizer of science and religion, Fritjof Capra, also attributes the origin of his book *The Tao of Physics* to his vision of the cosmic dance of Shiva.

In addition to the three classical sources of knowledge, namely, sense-experience, reason and intuition, there is a fourth and the highest source of knowledge called the supermind. In the largeness, subtlety, profundity and complexity of the spirit, reason is lost, intuition becomes a transit guide; but enlightenment must come from the supra-rational plane where supermind becomes the sole guru. Here ordinary logic is elevated to the status of what Sri Aurobindo calls the 'Logic of the Infinite.'

Evil is not the essential characteristic of the world. It emerges only at a certain stage of evolution. Animals have only the consciousness of pain and not of sin. They do not suffer from moral evil. Thus the animal life is infra-ethical. The urge for evolution passes through several stages: non-ethical, infra-ethical, anti-ethical, ethical, and finally reaches the supra-ethical state. Thus ethics serves a very useful human purpose, namely, it enables man to free himself from the clutches of ignorance and to prepare himself to receive the light of the Divine.

There is an element of purpose or design in all beings. One can observe that the lowest types of animals and insects are able to make perfect adjustment to their surroundings, although in a very limited and stereotyped manner. Even human beings need long education and culture to acquire such an adjustment. Thus there is a supreme hidden intelligence behind the whole of nature. This intelligence unfolds itself through a gradual process called evolution.

The process of evolution is a triple one, namely, widening, heightening and integration of consciousness. Widening means ascent of matter from simple to more complex forms. Heightening means ascent from one grade to another, like from the grade of matter to that of life. Integration means transformation of these grades through certain spiritual laws into a holistic being. The stages through which the process of evolution pass are inconscience, ignorance, and knowledge until finally the state of complete liberation of the spirit is reached.

The aim of evolution is not only the liberation of the spirit but the integral transformation of nature also. That is, mind, life and matter are liberated along with the spirit. This results in the emergence of a gnostic being. Evolution reaches its culmination when the Satchidananda ultimately manifests itself in the earth-consciousness. The destiny of man is then completely fulfilled. The permanent ascent to the supramental plane is the greatest spiritual experience man may have, but it is also the most difficult one, requiring superhuman effort and patience.

The person who reaches the stage of supermind is called a gnostic being. In him knowledge undergoes a fundamental change. The mind is replaced by a consciousness of unity where all seeming contradictions are spontaneously resolved. He goes beyond all mental and ethical laws. Indeed, he gives value and significance to those laws. The body of the gnostic being is a perfect and fit instrument of the spirit. The gnostic being is described as even a being superior to an avatar in many respects. In fact, the gnostic being is claimed to be the consummation of an avatar of God. The reverse of evolution is involution. Here the spirit makes a descent from the supermind to the mind, giving rise to the principle of ignorance. Between the supermind and the mind, there are various levels, namely the higher mind, illumined mind, intuition and the overmind.

The author contends that the system of Integral Advaitism of Sri Aurobindo is the culmination and fulfillment of all the philosophical schools, eastern and western, so far propounded. We do not fully agree with this view. Nor do we agree with his comparative views of a gnostic being and an avatar. His views on this topic appear to be arbitrary and unorthodox. The frequent severe and scathing attack on Sankara could have been avoided.

An excellent guide for the followers of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy.

Swami Abhiramananda
Ramakrishna Mission College of Education
Coimbatore

AYURVEDA—THE GENTLE HEALTH SYSTEM: By Hans H. Rhyner. Published by Motilal Banarsidass. 1998. Pp. 144. Rs.175.

Consisting of ten chapters and an introduction by P. Vishwanath Rai, this book covers familiar ground related to Ayurveda. It identifies the basic texts, its methodologies, the philosophical and medical bases, the anatomical aspects, diagnosis, nutrition, cleansing—both external and internal. Moreover, there is also an attempt at correlating contemporary medicine and Ayurveda. For instance, 'Ayurvedic terms for illnesses and diagnoses have been translated into the languages of modern medicine. The use of Ayurvedic treatment methods, therefore, is easy in cases where modern allopathic medicine continues to be unsuccessful or does not achieve the desired result.'

The rest of the book is concerned with diagnosis, treatment and healing by balancing bio-energies. In discussing these, the author tries to hint at the uniqueness of Ayurveda which consists in the fact that it gives 'equal weight to diet, life science and medicine.' Thus, illness 'as a bothersome malfunction of the organism caused by circumstances outside their control or as the result of aging' is, according to Ayurveda, wrong because 'every person carries great responsibilities.' And 'it is our duty to adhere to the natural law and to follow instructions for caring for our psychosomatic "machine", the organism that carries us through life.'

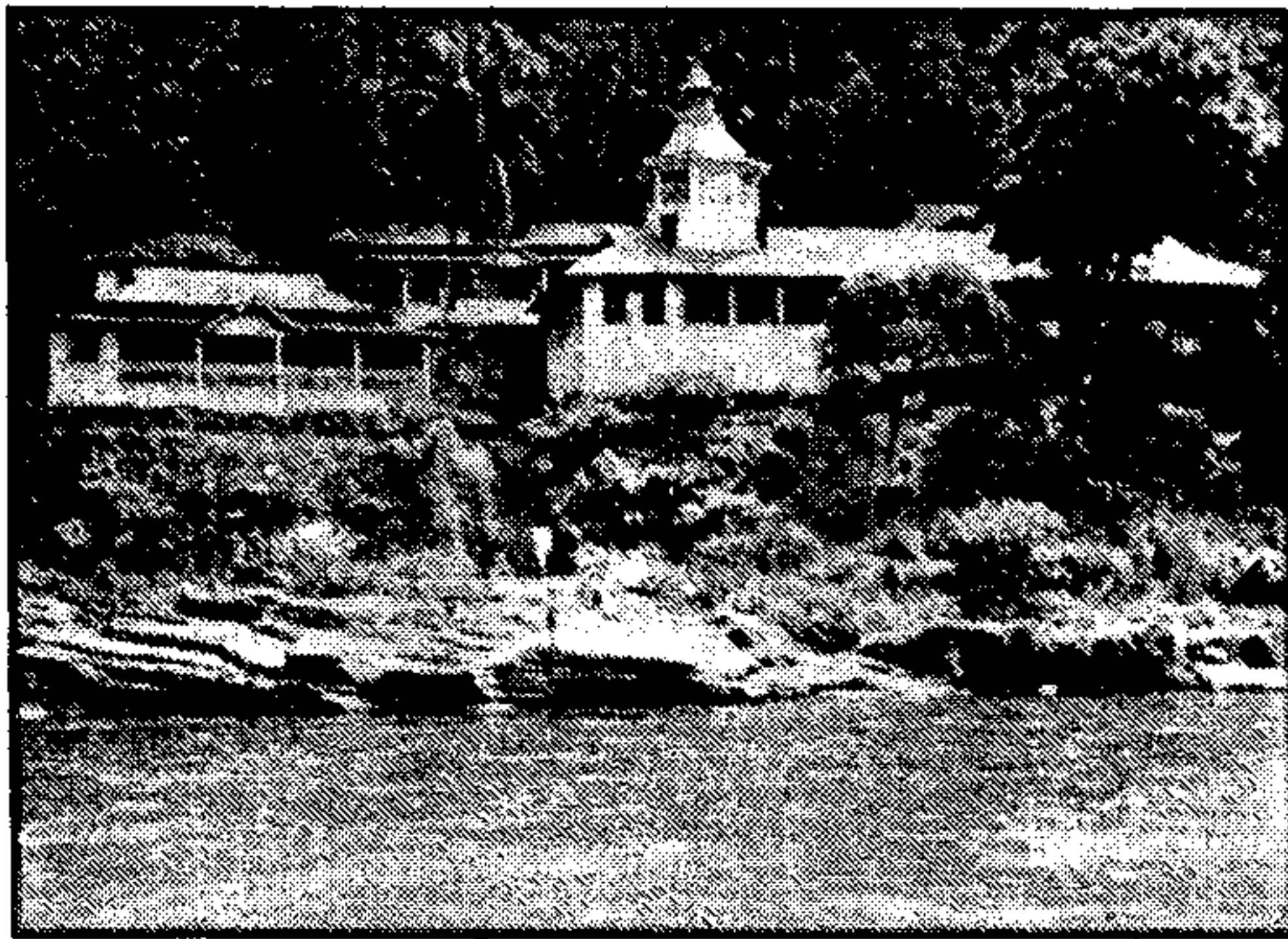
While all this is true, the observations seem to lack specificity and do not, by and large, transcend the generalizing that often marks books on Ayurveda. For instance, the author covers in two paragraphs what he describes as 'the irrational healing methods' which mean healing processes that allude human influences such as fate or the belief that God is responsible for the healing. Obviously, miracle cures figure here and this aspect could have been given more in-depth survey, particularly with the mention of colour and chakra therapy.

As the publishers claim, this is certainly an easy-to-read introduction, though it may not qualify to be a lavishly illustrated book as it is claimed to be. Ayurvedic healing is the buzz-word now and those who are interested may find this worth reading.

Dr M. Sivaramkrishna
Formerly Professor and Head
Dept of English, Osmania University
Hyderabad

News and Reports

PLATINUM JUBILEE CELEBRATION OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ASHRAMA, SHELLA



Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Shella

The establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunjee, in 1924 ushered in a new era of educational and cultural movement in the north-eastern hill state of Meghalaya. The region is known for torrential rains and treacherous terrain which make life quite difficult even for the local people. But thanks to the silent yet enriching work of the Ramakrishna Mission, the tiny villages and hamlets spread out over hills and valleys have been getting regular educational facilities and medical help for the past 75 years.

Inspired by Swami Vivekananda's fiery words, Swami Prabhanandaji (Ketaki Maharaj) started the work in Shella on a humble note, with an Ashrama and a primary school. Since then about 50 schools have sprung up across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, with their headquarters at Cherrapunjee. These

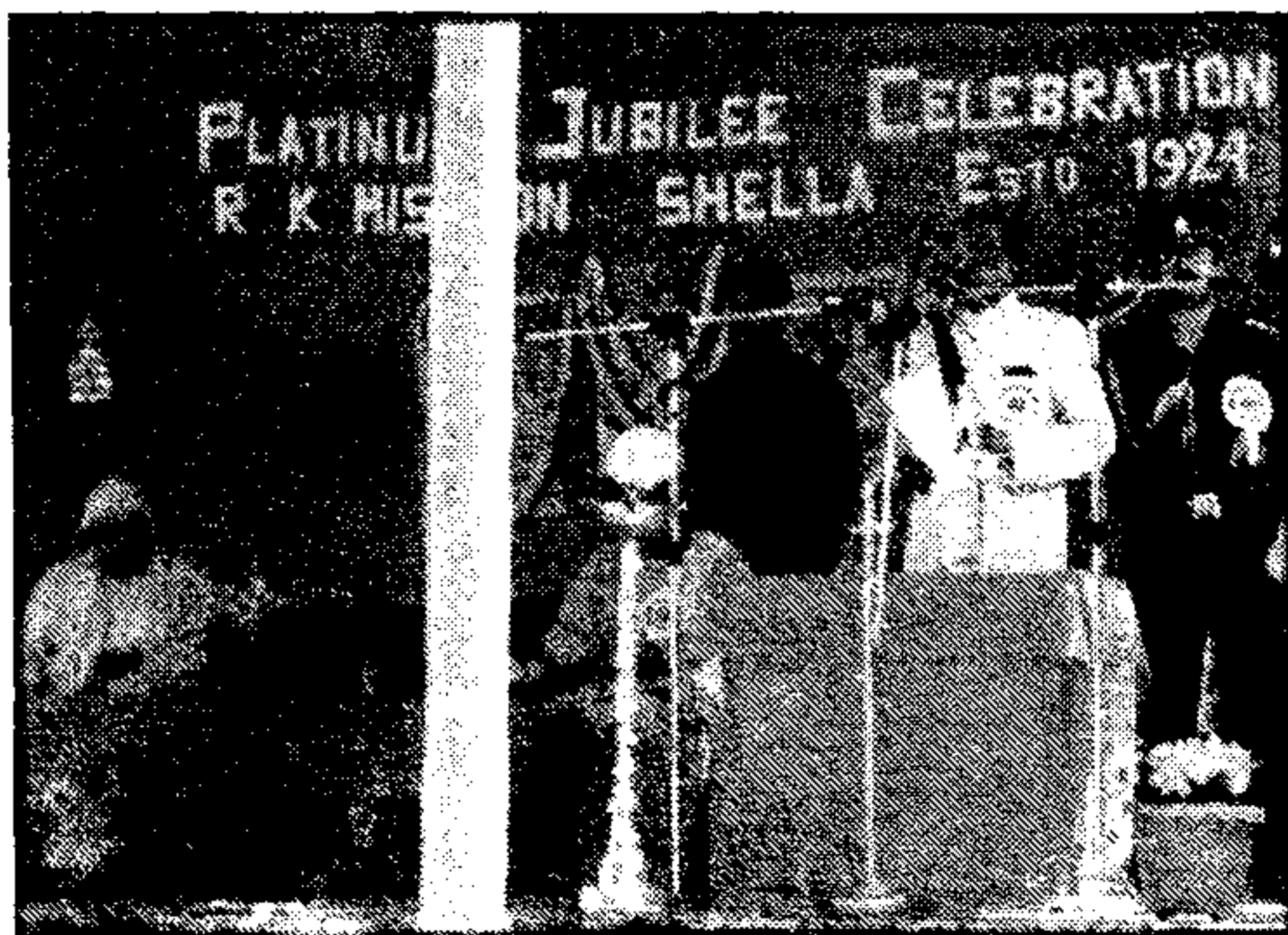


Swami Smarananandaji addressing the public meeting

institutions, the result of Ketaki Maharaj's determination and clarity of vision, now enjoy the gratitude of the whole of Meghalayan community.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Shella, now one of the sub-centres of the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunjee, celebrated its Platinum Jubilee on 26 and 27 February 2000, on completion of its 75 years of dedicated service among the Khasi tribals of Shella and its neighbouring villages.

The function, attended by a good number of monks and devotees, was inaugurated by His Excellency Mr M.M. Jacob, Governor of Meghalaya. Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, presided over the function, and Swami Gokulanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, delivered the Platinum Jubilee speech.



Mr M.M. Jacob delivering his speech



A scene from the drama 'Gangaputra Bhishma'